Libyan national security policy, 1969-1994 : a study in irrationality and third world security.

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Libyan National Security Policy, 1969-1994:
A Study in Irrationality and Third World Security

by

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Abstract

States seek security, and scholars of international relations routinely assume that they do so in a rational manner. However, in many instances this assumption of rationality may be neither warranted nor illuminating. Consider a state that habitually fails to achieve its security goals: is it self-evident that such a state is acting rationally? What if the state's behavior is demonstrably counterproductive when measured against its security objectives? Moreover, if the leaders of all states are rational actors then does the concept of rationality tell us anything worth knowing?

This study argues that the idea of rationality as employed by some scholars is of limited utility when applied to the national security policies of Third World states at odds with the dominant powers in the international order. Using Colonel Qaddafi's Libya as a case study, this thesis adopts a refined operational definition of rationality centered upon the habitual selection of efficacious behavior rather than the mere employment of cost-benefit analysis. By periodizing and analyzing Libyan national security policy between 1969 and 1994, it demonstrates that Tripoli's pursuit of security was frequently counterproductive: the very policies intended to make the state secure instead exacerbated the Libyan national security predicament.

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Introduction

One of the dilemmas that leader-driven explanations of foreign policy behavior pose is that the movers and shakers of history often pursue decidedly irrational policies . . . How do we square this kind of behavior with the logic of political realism?[1]

The determinants of a state's power are several; they include geographic and demographic magnitude, economic might, and military prowess. Ultimately, according to Hans Morgenthau (the father of political realist theory), none is more important or decisive than the quality of a state's leadership in its national security affairs.[2] Certainly none is more difficult for the historian or student of politics to assess.

The criteria for distinguishing 'good' leaders from those who are 'poor' are unhappily vague and subjective. Few would contest the idea that rationality (or its absence) should be an important criterion for making such a distinction, yet devising a theory of rationality which is applicable both to the study of politics in the abstract as well as to real world experience has proven far more difficult than anticipated. At one time it appeared that the advent of rational actor models derived from game theory might provide precise analytical tools

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[1] Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and Eugene R. Wittkopf, World politics: Trends and transformation, third edition, (London: Macmillan, 1989), 59.

[2] Morgenthau, 140, 158.

with which to redress this inadequacy. Sadly, it did not, for when applied to real world scenarios rather than to games, either the criteria for determining rationality became obtuse or the definition of rationality was diluted to the point of banality. Indeed, the reluctance of scholars to identify irrational actors (presumably owing to fear of their research being dismissed as subjective) has led to the prevalent assumption that all actors in the international system are rational--a surrealism of the type Lewis Carroll captured in his famous quip that '*everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes.'[3]

Clearly there is something amiss here. While rationality may appear to be relative when viewed from an ivory tower, such a nuanced view is of little aid to those who live closer to earth and who must daily grapple with the nuts and bolts of threats, deterrence, and force. For those charged with actually making and implementing security policy, the disjuncture between theory and reality consigns the former to ever greater irrelevancy. As one scholar recently noted:

> . . . strategic studies do little if anything to prepare national policymakers for confrontations with enemy states whose leaders do not conform to the pertinent rules of rational decision-making.[4]

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[3] Emphasis original. Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, ed. Donald Gray, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 2d ed., 23.

[4] Louis René Beres, "On the need for an Avant-Garde in strategic studies," Strategic Review, vol. 25, no.1 (Winter 1997), 73.

This thesis aims to redress this deficiency by exploring the origins, expressions, and consequences of irrational leadership in the national security affairs of a Third World state. It would be difficult to imagine a better candidate for such a study than the regime of Colonel Muammar El Qaddafi, the colorful and much-maligned leader of Libya since 1969. Few leaders have so frequently been awarded the appellation 'irrational' by journalists and statesmen; however, this branding has not significantly increased our understanding of the man or of the Libyan polity since none of Qaddafi's detractors (or admirers) have systematically explored what it means to be rational or irrational.

This study takes as its foundation the proposition that the concept of irrationality can and should have other than a pejorative usage. Properly defined, it should be a reasonably effective tool (by the standards of social science) for parsing the history of nations and, more particularly, for assessing the contributions of individual and collective actors. The thesis itself can be succinctly stated as follows: *Colonel Qaddafi's leadership in Libyan national security affairs from 1969 to 1995 was consistently self-defeating when measured against his own objectives. This pattern of counterproductive behavior constitutes irrationality, and in Qaddafi's case originated in both systemic and personal forces, namely, a lack of political accountability on the one hand, and on the other an*

inability to reconcile Qaddafi's world view with geostrategic reality.

Before turning to the historical record to establish the validity of this argument, we must consider a number of critical questions: What is rationality? Is Qaddafi an irrational actor? If so, what makes him tick? Finally, why were his policies counterproductive? In addition to addressing these questions, this chapter discusses a few pertinent methodological issues (e.g., availability of source material) and provides a brief synopsis of the succeeding chapters.

I. What is rationality?

Though one might assume that the task of defining rationality is rightfully the province of psychologists, the definition of rationality which has become dominant in the literature of international relations comes instead from mathematics via its sub-discipline, game theory. Rationality, as defined by game theorists, means that in any given situation in which a player (i.e., an actor) faces one or more options with different utility pay-offs, he will always act in such a way so as to maximize his rewards.[5] Rationality, in other words, equates to the application of cost-benefit analysis. Unfortunately, in assessing real world decisions it may

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[5] Roger Myerson, Game theory: Analysis of conflict, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 2-3; cf. Frank Zagare, Game theory: Concepts and applications (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1984), 7.

be impossible for external observers to determine whether cost-benefit analysis took place, much less what the content of that analysis was. *However, it is a comparatively facile matter to tailor a cost-benefit analysis to fit any decision after the fact.* For example, we may not truly know with any specificity what an automobile driver who died while trying to beat a train through a railroad crossing was thinking at the time, but with little effort we can devise a cost-benefit analysis that explains his decision. Virtually all decisions, no matter how disastrous their consequences, can thus be rendered rational.

Unsurprisingly, game theorists routinely assume all players--and their decisions--to be rational.[6] Moreover, in complex scenarios involving multiple players, they further assume that each player has perfect knowledge of every other player's pay-off utility matrices (thereby permitting each to make informed estimations of the others' likely actions). The rationale for these assumptions is simply theoretical convenience; theory, by its very nature, never corresponds precisely to the real world. Thus, the assumption that all actors are rational is not intended to reflect reality but to approximate it; irrational actors may exist, but they are held to be the exception and unworthy of study.

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[6] Martin Shubik, Game theory in the social sciences: Concepts and solutions, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 16).

These assumptions may be justified when confined to the controlled atmosphere of academic inquiry. They are, however, less tenable when applied to a world where human and inter-state relations are marred by poor communications, imperfect information, and diverse value systems. In such a world, it is not always possible to understand what the long-term consequences of a decision will be, much less how another actor perceives the costs and benefits inherent in any given choice. Thus, there are no guarantees that real world actors will exercise their volition in accordance with the dictates of theory.

Experts in the study of conflict are well aware of the limitations of theory. Schelling, in his seminal study The strategy of conflict, observes that: 'the assumption of rational behavior is a productive one in the generation of systematic theory. If behavior were actually cool-headed, valid and relevant theory would probably be easier to create than it actually is.'[7] In other words, as Schelling admits, the widespread assumption of rationality results in theory which is 'not . . . fully accurate.'[8]

Nevertheless, the assumptions of game theory have been indiscriminately transferred to the study of the game of nations. In most instances, states and their leaders are presumed to be rational. To cite just one

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[7] Thomas Schelling, The strategy of conflict, first published 1960, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980), 16.

[8] ibid.

example, Kegley and Wittkopf, in answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, propose erasing the notion of irrationality by reducing rationality itself to acting according to one's preferences:

> Why did Libya's leader, the mercurial Muammar Qaddafi, repeatedly challenge the United States, almost goading President Ronald Reagan into a military strike against the North African desert country in 1986? Because, we can postulate, Qaddafi's actions were consistent with his preferences, regardless of how 'irrational' it was for a fourth-rate military power to take on the world's preeminent superpower.[9]

This is no solution but an unfortunate tautology. If all choices represent preferences, and if selecting a preference is the quintessence of rationality, then an irrational choice becomes a logical impossibility! Moreover, if all decisions are rational, then rationality itself tells us nothing worthwhile; we might as well say that all decisions are orange.

Preference is also a poor standard upon which to base our analysis because preferences are fleeting and inconsistent. Although an actor should be allowed a degree of tactical flexibility in responding to changing circumstances, such reasonable adaptations must be differentiated from the incessant shuffling of priorities which disguises an inability to devise and execute a coherent plan to achieve strategic objectives. Otherwise, even the most self-destructive behavior can be excused by ascribing it to some value (e.g., honor or

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[9] ibid., 59-60.

revenge) which an individual allows to temporarily supersede his normal priorities. All leaders rationalize their decisions; this does not make all their decisions rational.

In a slight variation of the Kegley-Wittkopf theme, scholars commonly argue that seemingly irrational leaders are simply motivated by a different value structure or strategic culture. For example, Rubin argues:

> Third World dictators often take extreme positions or seemingly suicidal actions that appear irrational to Americans but are the reflections of the dictatorship's ideology and requirements for staying in power . . . (these regimes) operate on different criteria from those of democracies, not only because their nations' histories and regional situations are different but also because their internal politics are different.[10]

Garfinkle, to cite yet another example, applies this formulation to Saddam Hussein's behavior in the Gulf crisis:

> . . . because rationality is context--and culture--dependent, what is and is not rational is not always obvious from the outside. Saddam acted rationally in the situation in which he found himself because there are times in Middle Eastern political cultures when it is better (e.g., literally safer) to be defeated (so long as one is not totally destroyed) than to be dishonored.[11]

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[10] Barry Rubin, Modern dictators: Third World coup makers, strongmen, and populist tyrants, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1987), 328.

[11] Adam Garfinkle, "An observation on Arab culture and deterrence: Metaphors and misgivings," in Regional security regimes: Israel and its neighbors, ed. Efraim Inbar, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 205. Parentheses original.

This line of reasoning merely substitutes one pay-off matrix for another once it becomes clear that the actor's choices were self-defeating and therefore inexplicable under the first matrix. The end result is the same: all choices are rational, or at least can be made to seem rational if only viewed in the most forgiving light.

There is no denying that different cultures have different value structures, though the significance of these differences is easily overstated (e.g., how many cultures believe that their enemies do not value life the same way they do?). It may also be true that some actors have conflicting values, and hence conflicting pay-off matrices. But the inability to reconcile the mandates of a 'disorderly and inconsistent value system' is, as Schelling himself concedes, not proof of rationality but evidence of its opposite.[12]

The reduction of rationality to the lowest common denominator--choice--was perhaps to be expected in an era in which all values are held to be relative. However, much of the descriptive and analytical power of the concept is lost in the process. If all statesmen are rational, then we must search for some other analytical tool by which to winnow the wheat from the chaff.

Clearly, we must reconceptualize rationality as something other than an expression of preference or a question of cost-benefit analysis if the term is to tell us something useful about history, for history judges men

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[12] Schelling, 16-17.

not only by their motives but by their accomplishments. Should strategic studies not do the same? Surely one of the attributes of 'good' statesmanship is that of purpose--of not merely reacting to the vagaries of chance and circumstance but of possessing an agenda and accomplishing its points. Rationality, it follows, should be determined by examining a leader's decisions and examining their actual consequences, not just their intended ones. Even this is not the most stringent accounting which one could make; as Lisa Anderson, the foremost Western authority on Libya, points out: 'any fair assessment of the Jamahiriyya would require not only holding the regime to its own ambitious standards but also comparing it with plausible alternatives.'[13] However, given the difficulties inherent in trying to calculate historical opportunity costs, this is an impractical standard for our purposes.

Naturally, isolated incidents of success or failure are inconclusive: fortune may at times favor the undeserving and frown upon the worthy. Moreover, a leader may be excused the occasional lapse of judgement. We must therefore take a wide sample in order to ensure significance. Should the historical record reveal a consistent pattern of counterproductive behavior, that pattern constitutes irrationality.

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[13] Lisa Anderson, 'Qadhafi's legacy: An evaluation of a political experiment,' in Vandewalle, 223.

Seen in this light, rationality is demonstrated by the adoption of efficacious behavior rather than by the mere application of cost-benefit analysis. *Let us therefore operationally define rationality as the practice of consistently efficacious behavior, or in other words, behavior that demonstrably advances an actor towards the achievement of his goals. It follows that irrationality is the habitual selection of choices that prove counterproductive to the fulfillment of one's aims.*[14]

Why are some actors irrational and others not? We should not assume that rationality is the norm and irrationality an aberration, common though this prejudice may be. In point of fact, note how Henry Kissinger describes Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union: '(Stalin assumed) that Hitler engaged in rational calculations; however, Hitler did not consider himself bound by a normal calculation of risks.'[15] However, it is not self-evident that either man or the state is exclusively, or even usually, rational. Rational and irrational impulses co-exist in each. (Moreover, as Schelling points out, there are situations in which

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[14] NB--Hence, as used throughout this thesis, irrationality is a descriptive political term rather than a diagnostic psychiatric term.

[15] Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 364. Parentheses added.

irrationality--or even a reputation of irrationality--may convey a distinct advantage to an actor.[16])

Perhaps we may detect a clue to the origins of irrationality by noting that efficacious social behavior is learned behavior. As children, humans are generally rewarded by their parents for those behaviors needed to survive in a complex society, and punished for those that are not. However, behaviors which are temporarily effective may become inappropriate and even counterproductive as circumstances change. For example, a small child who discovers that temper tantrums are an effective means of getting her way may continue to repeat that behavior long after it ceases to produce the desired outcome so long as she is not held accountable (i.e., her parents tolerate the tantrums).

Such self-defeating behaviors are more common than one might suspect; indeed, they appear to be part and parcel of the human condition. Consider the recluse who, though he desires friends, fears rejection and therefore adopts behaviors which amplify his sense of loneliness and estrangement. Or the woman who, depressed at the thought of being obese, indulges her sweet tooth to raise her spirits. Or the man who, anxious to avoid the stress of undertaking a project, procrastinates until his stress level becomes extreme. Or the totalitarian leader whose professed aim is to create a powerful state, but who--because he is indifferent to the suffering of his people

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[16] Schelling, 17.

and unfettered by the legal and political constraints shouldered by democratic leaders--persists in policies which bring ruin upon his nation (and even his own geopolitical aspirations) long after those consequences are apparent.

Such individuals are irrational because they can afford to be; they are cocooned in high office, shielded from domestic political threats, and all too frequently indifferent to the human misery generated by their behavior. Irrational behavior is therefore not the result of some immutable defect of personality or intellect, but is rather an indulgence: it is the luxury of those who are unaccountable. So long as individuals are not held responsible (either by themselves or by some external agent) for the consequences of their actions, there is little impetus for them to alter their counterproductive behaviors. Trapped by inertia, they will not escape the cycle of self-defeating behavior unless they are impelled by circumstance or ambition.

The implications of this theory of rationality are intriguing. First, understanding irrationality as an indulgence, rather than as a defect, rids the concept of its most pejorative connotations. Irrationality thus conceived is not particular to any nation, culture, race or gender--a point worth stressing since some might otherwise object to its application to Libya on the grounds that it might abet anti-Arab or anti-Muslim stereotypes. There is no denying that the Libyan

leader's antagonists have often questioned his rationality with an eye towards discrediting him. Anwar Sadat, for example, often referred to Qaddafi as a 'crazy boy' and once memorably described the Colonel as possessing 'a split personality--both evil.' Ronald Reagan not only questioned Qaddafi's sanity (calling him a 'mad clown') but dubbed him a 'flaky barbarian,' a remarkably un-illuminating appraisal.[1] Reinforcing such aspersions is not the aim of this thesis, yet their existence should not prevent us from making measured judgements of Qaddafi's record as a statesman and strategist.

A second implication of our theory of rationality is that an irrational actor (per our definition) is not incapable of rational behavior (and hence undeterrable). Quite the opposite is true--deterrents impose accountability upon an actor and thus reduce the scope for irrational behavior. Since rationality is often discussed with reference to deterrence, this is an important *aperçu*.

Granted, the linkage between irrationality and accountability might lead one to ask whether the expression of irrationality is really irrational at all. By the standards of cost-benefit analysis it might not be. But again, the effect of equating rationality with cost-benefit analysis in which values fluctuate and all costs are bearable is to deprive the word of meaning. Above all, rationality denotes the pursuit of long-term

interests, an ability to think and act on a level above the mandates of visceral emotion in order to accomplish a pre-determined task.

Having discussed rationality in general terms, let us now apply our definition to a specific case.

II. Is Qaddafi an irrational actor?

With regards to Libyan national security affairs, the answer to the above question is a resounding yes. This is true, not--as is often argued--because the Libyan leader is quixotic or anti-Western, or because he suffers from some psychological malady, but because his behavior is demonstrably self-defeating when measured against his core security objectives. Let us therefore pause to consider just what the North African leader set out to accomplish.

Discerning a state's national security objectives requires some critical thought. If one attempts to cull a state's objectives solely from its declaratory policy, then one must contend with questions of propaganda, intentional obfuscation, and deliberate mistruths. In addition, one must bear in mind that at times a state might be unsure of what its interests are and how it should pursue them, with the result that its deeds may contradict its declared policy.[17] Consequently, national

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[17] 'All nations like to impute to other states a degree of rational and hierarchical decision-making and planning which they do not have themselves and which, if the truth were known, other states probably do not have either.' Earl Fry, Stan Taylor and Robert Wood, America the vincible: U.S. foreign policy for the

security objectives must be pieced together both by reference to a state's declaratory policy and by inference from its diplomatic and military actions. Only thus can we reach a reasonably accurate understanding of what a government hoped to achieve.

The origins of Qaddafi's national security agenda will be explained later in this chapter, but his aims can be briefly summarized here. These aims fluctuated somewhat over time but rarely strayed from well established parameters.

Qaddafi's supreme ambition was to transform Libya into a Great Power. His Grand Strategy for realizing this aim entailed creating a 'unified' (i.e., Libyan-controlled) polity capable of eradicating Western (especially American) influence in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. Any diminution of Western, Israeli, or Arab 'lackey' power was considered a victory in this zero-sum struggle. Over time, and in the face of repeated setbacks, Qaddafi devoted increased attention to the slightly less ambitious objective of establishing regional hegemony.

In accordance with this Grand Strategy, the eleven most important objectives of Libyan national security were:

- To increase the strength of the Libyan armed forces by expanding their manpower and by purchasing state of the art weaponry.

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twenty-first century, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 87.

♦ To expand the state's resources and geographic boundaries by merging with neighboring states.

♦ To intimidate and, if need be, to coerce weaker states through conventional military force.

♦ To subvert hostile or uncooperative governments.

♦ To support guerrilla and terrorist groups with a shared anti-Western agenda.

♦ To project power throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean.

♦ To challenge, diminish, and ultimately end the U.S.
Sixth Fleet's dominance of the Mediterranean.

♦ To form regional alliances propitious to the accomplishment of Qaddafi's Grand Strategy.

♦ To produce or otherwise acquire weapons of mass destruction.

♦ To cow political opposition by assassinating Libyan dissidents at home and abroad.

♦ To participate in the destruction of Israel.

Even the most cursory familiarity with contemporary Libyan history leads to the conclusion that Qaddafi failed to achieve his own national security objectives, primarily because his behavior was non-conducive to those ends. Instead of forging an anti-American or anti-Israeli coalition, he alienated and antagonized his neighbors, the very states whose cooperation was essential to the success of his Grand Strategy, and in so doing allowed the United States to establish a stronger regional presence. Time after time, Qaddafi pushed the policy envelope to extremes where it was bereft of clear (and obtainable) objectives, and stripped of even the

erstwhile justification of his Third Universal Theory. All that remained was shrill extremism, an extremism which propelled Libya into disputes from the South Pacific to the Caribbean, disputes which dissipated the country's strength and earned it new enemies. By 1994 Libya was isolated on the global stage and was treated as a pariah even within the Arab world. UN sanctions eviscerated the operational readiness of its armed forces. Moreover, Libya's unrepentant sponsorship of terrorism (especially its intransigence over the Lockerbie affair) and its development of chemical weapons threatened to entangle the state in further military confrontations with the West. *The ultimate legacy of Qaddafi's national security policies was chronic insecurity.*

Even scholars who believe Qaddafi to be rational agree that his foreign and defence policies were ruinous. Indeed, the failure of these policies became evident within the first decade of Qaddafi's rule. As one writer noted at the time, Qaddafi's policies were pursued with much fanfare but 'yielded few worthwhile long-term dividends.'[18] Fifteen years later they had done little better: the regimes's accomplishments 'seemed few and largely unintended.'[19] Libyan foreign policy in particular was distinguished by a 'singular lack of

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[18] John Wright, Libya: A modern history, (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 172-73.

[19] Anderson, 223.

success.'[20] The literature abounds with concurring opinions. How then can one argue that policies which produced such abysmal results were nevertheless rational?

III. Irrationality and its discontents

Whereas Western journalists and politicians may at times be wont to saddle the Libyan regime with the moniker "irrational," academics who have specialized in the study of contemporary Libya tend instead to characterize the Qaddafi regime, and Qaddafi himself, as rational. Neither characterization, unfortunately, is entirely satisfactory. In the first instance, irrationality is commonly employed in a pejorative, as opposed to an analytical, sense. That academics would attempt to distance themselves from such pejorative connotations (and from the policies associated with such pejorative usage) is entirely understandable. Indeed, it is perhaps no acident that during the mid to late 1980s, when Libya found itself in almost continuous conflict with the world's most powerful state (whose leaders were persuaded of, and themselves proclaimed, Tripoli's irrationality), scholars of contemporary Libya were most vocal in professing the rationality of the Libyan regime. In other words, typifying Qaddafi's government as rational was, in many cases, an apparent reaction to the sometimes flippant manner in which Libya was dismissed as irrational.

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[20] St. John, 11-12.

However, the scholarship that professed Qaddafi's rationality was not entirely suasive either. In large part, this was because the theoretical construct used to explore rationality in the Libyan context was somewhat flawed. In some instances, demonstrating the rationality of Libya's ends meant regurgitating the regime's paranoid interpretation of the international security environment. In other cases, attempting to demonstrate the rationality of Libya's means led to reducing rationality itself to a question of cost-benefit analysis and ultimately, preference: whatever the regime chose to do, it had presumably settled on because it had weighed its options and chose the best, hence its actions were rational. In other words, the scholarship was built in part upon acceptance of inherent unknowables: because it was impossible to replicate with absolute precision the options, objectives, and pay-off matrices as perceived by Libyan decision-makers, there was no way to effectively measure whether Libya had in fact settled upon the optimal means for advancing its self-interest.

There is a problem, then, with how the concept of rationality has been applied to Libya. Nevertheless, this thesis is not meant to be an assault upon rational actor theory itself. Critiquing the utility of rational actor theory as applied to international relations would involve far more than what this work aspires to achieve. Rather, the intent is to, firstly, dispute the way in which that conceptual paradigm has been invoked

(particularly, as we shall see, by Mary-Jane Deeb) with regards to Libya and, secondly, to forward an alternative conceptualization of rational state behavior that, within the limited context of Libyan security policy, provides a more useful instrument of analysis.

There are two grounds upon which one might object to the proposition that Qaddafi is an irrational actor. First, one could categorically reject the idea of irrationality itself by appealing to the cost-benefit notions of rationality introduced in the foregoing pages. Second, one could specifically object that even if one admits the existence of irrational actors, Qaddafi should not be numbered among their ranks. Both lines of thought have been employed in previous studies of contemporary Libya.

As we have seen, the favored approach of scholars who are reluctant to see the idea of irrationality gain currency in political discourse is to simply eliminate the very possibility of irrationality by invoking cost-benefit analysis and dubbing all actions rational. Little more needs to be said about the merits of this argument.

A much more interesting objection is that states are not simple unitary actors but complex political organisms with labyrinthine bureaucracies and convoluted decision making processes. Thus, one could argue that ascribing responsibility for policy to a single individual distorts that reality, and at worst may be tantamount to

intellectual laziness. Perhaps because the Western media has taken such obvious delight in reporting Qaddafi's alleged eccentricities, this particular objection has become something of a mantra for scholars of Libyan affairs.[21]

Theirs is a reasonable criticism. Qaddafi was by no means the only factor behind Libyan national security policy. He was, however, by far the most important factor, and there are compelling reasons for awarding Qaddafi primacy of place in our study. Leadership-centric models which might not be appropriate for industrialized states are nevertheless effective explanations of Third World state behavior because developing societies tend to have fewer political and institutional checks on their political elites.[22] These underdeveloped legal, social, and bureaucratic safeguards afford leaders extraordinary latitude in formulating policy. As will be more fully explained in Chapter Six, Libya was unmistakably one such society.[23]

Second, the centralization of decision making in Libya was unusual even for a developing state. As Owen

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[21] See I. William Zartman and A. G. Kluge, "Heroic politics: The foreign policy of Libya," in The foreign policy of Arab states, ed. Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 175; St. John 1987, 11; Ruth First, Libya: The elusive revolution, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974), 20; Deeb 1991, 7.

[22] Peter Calvert, The foreign policy of new states, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

[23] Even scholars who caution against the use of leadership models admit their relevance in the case of Libya. See Wittkopf and Kegley, 56.

notes, the state 'became Qaddafi's Libya in a way that it could never have been Bourguiba's Tunisia or Nasser's Egypt.'[24] This was especially true with regards to Libyan national security policy. Qaddafi appropriated the defence portfolio shortly after seizing power in 1969 and never relinquished it. Within a decade he had successfully marginalized his peers, thereby freeing himself of the only significant remaining check on his one-man rule. With seemingly unlimited oil revenues and no one to answer to, Qaddafi was able to embark on an irrational path.

Scholars who understate Qaddafi's preeminence in policy making, preferring subtler systemic explanations, leave us with a sterile appreciation of the Jamahiriya's policies. Indeed, to minimize Qaddafi's impact upon contemporary Libya is to deny the salient feature of that society.

More rigorous arguments are to be expected from those students of contemporary Libya who, though they may admit the theoretical possibility of irrational state behavior, argue that Qaddafi's conduct of Libya's national security affairs has been rational. Advocates of Qaddafi's rationality tend to employ one of three arguments in making their case. Many take his rationality to be self-evident: Qaddafi survived, *ergo* he must be rational. Others employ the tired argument that

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[24] Roger Owen, Preface to Qadhafi's Libya 1969 to 1994, ed. Dirk Vandewalle, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995) xi.

Qaddafi's behavior is rational if understood in terms of his background and ideology (in other words, if he is judged by a more forgiving pay-off matrix). The least common argument is that Qaddafi's rationality is demonstrated by his practice of *realpolitik*; by this standard, all realists are rational (with apologies to liberals and other idealogues, who presumably are not).

The contention that political survival establishes rationality is perhaps the least suasive of the three; nevertheless, it is frequently heard.[25] Mary-Jane Deeb, the most ardent defender of the Libyan leader's rationality, nicely summarizes the argument:

> To explain the complexity of Libya's relations to other states in terms of Qadhdhafi's "madness" or "irrationality" is to miss the whole point of his foreign policy. In fact, if Qadhdhafi were so out of touch with reality, and if his perceptions and expectations were so irrational and distorted, it is very unlikely that he would have remained in power for so long or played such an active role in Arab and African affairs.[26]

The problems with this argument are two-fold. First, it conceives of irrationality as an immutable condition that manifests itself across the board, rather than as a behavior which is primarily displayed under discrete circumstances (i.e., in the absence of accountability). Yet there is no reason to assume that individuals who may

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[25] See, for example, the comments of former Soviet Ambassador to Libya O.G. Peresypkin in Alexei Vassiliev, Russian policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to pragmatism, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 286.

[26] Deeb, 7.

exhibit self-defeating behavior under some circumstances are incapable of rational behavior in other situations.

Second, survival is not the only grounds upon which a political leader should be evaluated, nor is playing 'an active role' in regional affairs the same as playing a productive or successful role. Qaddafi set out to do far more than merely retain his office and be 'active' in Arab affairs. Thus, to dub him rational on the basis of that one feat is to ignore the more compelling question of why he did not fulfill his larger ambitions.

Qaddafi's ideology--an amalgam of clichéd revolutionary slogans and utopian ruminations--is frequently invoked as proof of the Libyan leader's rationality. If only one could see the world as Qaddafi does, or so the argument goes, then the logic of the Colonel's seemingly self-defeating behavior would become apparent. Robert Bruce St. John, whose work best illustrates this line of thought, asserts that Libyan foreign policy must be understood through reference to the regime's motto: 'Freedom, Socialism, Unity.'[27] Driven by unswerving devotion to these ideals, Qaddafi pursued 'a rational foreign policy.'[28]

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[27] Robert Bruce St. John, Qaddafi's world design: Libyan foreign policy, 1969-1987, (London: Saqi Books, 1987) 18-19; see also I. William Zartman and A. G. Kluge, "Heroic politics: The foreign policy of Libya," in The foreign policy of Arab states, ed. Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 175.

[28] St.John, 143.

At first glance, this line of reasoning seems plausible enough, but upon closer consideration it becomes apparent that ideology-based explanations of Libyan behavior suffer from serious defects. Foremost of these are problems of scope and intellectual consistency: Qaddafi threw his ideological net so wide, and the net itself was riven with so many holes, that his ideology had little meaning or explanatory power. The Colonel's rhetoric was always elastic enough to make any decision appear consistent with the regime's ideology, even if that decision was a complete reversal of former policies. Attempting to cobble a coherent and cohesive philosophy from the Libyan leader's pronouncements is therefore an endeavor doomed to frustration.

Application of revolutionary ideals in Libya was selective at best. Consider, for example, Qaddafi's aid to various groups of 'freedom fighters.' Such aid was not based on principle but on Machiavellian calculations. The Colonel's support of insurrectionists in New Caledonia and Francophone Africa stemmed directly from his contest with France for control of Chad, as Qaddafi himself admitted:

> If France harasses us in Chad, we must harass it everywhere. If it fights us in Chad, we fight it everywhere--from Martinique to New Caledonia, passing through its bases in Africa . . . I hope that the French people do not sacrifice their interests with Libya for the problem of Chad.[29]

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[29] FBIS, 10 November 1985.

By the same token, his aid to guerrillas in Central America increased in direct proportion to the escalation of his problems with the Reagan administration:

> 'When we ally ourselves with revolution in Latin America, and particularly Central America, we are defending ourselves. This satan (the United States) must be clipped and we must take war to the American borders just as America is taking threats to the Gulf of Sidra and to the Tibesti Mountains.'[30]

When relations between Libya and the United States been warmer, Tripoli's support for Central American revolutionaries was considerably cooler.

Indeed, Qaddafi apparently had few qualms about abandoning his 'freedom fighters' whenever it served his purposes. In the early 1980s he suspended aid to the Western Saharan Polisario Front as part of a reconciliation with Morocco; in the 1990s he terminated assistance to the Irish Republican Army, and even gave intelligence about the group to British authorities, in an effort to improve relations with London.

Qaddafi's putative devotion to socialism was just as selective and self-serving. Despite his avowed opposition to capitalism, the Colonel sanctioned a brisk trade with his erstwhile adversaries, using his oil revenues to import European and American goods and services. When he deigned to acknowledge the apparent inconsistency at all, he described such trade as 'non-exploitative capitalism'--a curious choice of words for

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[30] FBIS, September 1983.

someone who at other times held that capitalism was inherently exploitative.

Unity, in Qaddafi's parlance, embraced Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, as well as solidarity in the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Above all, it entailed merging Libya with its neighbors to create a new polity. However, as neighboring powers soon learned, Qaddafi wanted unity on his own terms or not at all.[31] Libya's neighbors rapidly grew disenchanted. Each successive bid for 'unity' was met by suspicion (and no small amount of mockery) abroad. Frustrated, Qaddafi tried to achieve his ends by force or subversion. More often than not, he ended up accentuating the fragmentation of the Arab world rather than transcending it. The hallowed ideal of Arab unity did not, for example, prevent Tripoli from briefly going to war with Egypt, skirmishing with Tunisia, and supporting Iran during its war with Iraq. Nor did Islamic unity impede Tripoli from supporting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or from arming Chadian and Sudanese Christian groups against their Muslim countrymen when it suited the regime's purposes.

The latitude of Qaddafi's ideological inconsistency clearly extended beyond 'tactical flexibility.' Thus, at best, attempting to derive evidence of Qaddafi's rationality from his ideology ultimately becomes an

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[31] Anwar el-Sadat, In search of identity (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1978), 217.

exercise in switching pay-off matrices so as to exempt him of responsibility for the failure of his policies (since rationality is conceived of in terms of preferences rather than results). At worst, rationalizing Libyan policy in terms of ideology amounts to little more than regurgitating the regime's propaganda.

The final (and most original) argument in behalf of Qaddafi's rationality is found in the scholarship of Mary-Jane Deeb. Deeb actually makes two arguments in favor of Qaddafi's rationality (beyond the survival=rationality argument noted above). First, she argues that Libyan security policy was a logical response to the regime's perceived threats. Second, having noted the problems which beset the ideological approach, she contends that Libyan foreign and defence policy was determined primarily by national interests; ideology was only allowed to be a critical determinant when vital interests were not at stake (she proposes that the degree of ideology reflected in Libyan foreign policy was proportional to a state's distance from Libya).[32] In other words, she believes Qaddafi to be a realist, and the exhibition of realism to be proof of rationality.

Unfortunately, Deeb seriously misrepresents the regime's security objectives to make her argument stick:

> Libya's core foreign policy objectives in North Africa have been to protect the regime from

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[32] Mary-Jane Deeb, Libya's foreign policy in North Africa, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 9.

> external attempts to overthrow it and to defend Libyan territory from attacks and threats of invasion by neighboring states.[33]

As will be abundantly demonstrated in the following chapters, Qaddafi's goals were not so modest. Why does Deeb get it wrong? Though she acknowledges Qaddafi's dominant role in defining Libya's national interests and formulating policy, she skirts the implications because she finds the impact of individuals difficult to deal with empirically. As she puts it, interpreting Libyan behavior in light of Qaddafi's psychological determinants 'lacks rigorous scientific analysis.'[34] This aversion to considering the role of the individual engenders a flaw in her reasoning: an aggressive leader does not define his nation's interests in benign terms. Nevertheless, Deeb interprets Qaddafi as a perennially threatened party whose behavior was invariably defensive.

This interpretation is not supported by the historical record. Libya displayed far more interest in invading its neighbors than vice-versa. Indeed, Qaddafi pointedly refused to endorse a territorial-defence oriented army, and later attempted to configure his forces for power-projection and offensive operations.[35]

It is true enough that from its inception, the Qaddafi regime loudly proclaimed that it felt threatened

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[33] Deeb 1991, 15.

[34] Deeb 1991, 6-7.

[35] Salah El Saadany, Egypt and Libya from inside, 1969-1976, (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 22.

by external powers. Indeed, if one were to accept all of Qaddafi's expressions of threat perception at face value, then the Libyan regime lived in a perpetual state of extreme anxiety.[36] However, it strains credulity to maintain that the Libyan leader took seriously the more improbable threats which he publicly decried, as when he accused the United States of plotting a nuclear attack on Africa to rid the globe of its excess population.[37]

In any event, the sincerity of Tripoli's expressed fears is beside the point; empathy is not the highest level of insight to which the study of international relations should aspire, and the Libyan regime's fears were rarely justified by objective fact. Instead, Libya's denunciations of foreign 'threats' were usually intended to justify the state's adventurism and to mobilize domestic support for the regime. Indeed, the very actions which Tripoli found threatening were frequently the product of its own behavior. For example, Tripoli's responses to the multiple deployments of French forces to Chad could be seen as threat-motivated only if divorced from the expansionist policies (in the Aouzou Strip) which prompted those deployments in the first place.

The same was true of the 'threats' Libya encountered in the Mediterranean. In 1973 Tripoli--citing the needs

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[36] William Gutteridge, Libya: Still a threat to Western interests? Conflict Studies no. 160 (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1984), 5.

[37] FBIS-NES-94-202, 18 October 1994, 20.

of national security--proclaimed its sovereignty over the Gulf of Sirte, and began asserting its claim by force. On multiple occasions Libyan military units attacked units of the U.S. Sixth Fleet exercising in the disputed region as part of a long-standing U.S. policy of upholding freedom of navigation in international waters. These clashes were cited by some as evidence that Libya's expansionist behavior was normal for a 'threatened' state.[38] Yet juggling cause and effect does not erase the fact that Libya's maritime claims were made in defiance of international convention, or the fact that it was the Libyan forces which repeatedly instigated hostilities with the Sixth Fleet. Qaddafi's conception of security, however much it appealed to those sympathetic to his point of view, was not recognized by international law.

Nevertheless, Deeb uncritically accepts expressions of threat perception as the basis for Libyan behavior. Indeed, her main contention is that:

> . . . this perception of threat coupled with the knowledge of Libya's inherent weakness has been the main motivating factor behind Qadhdhafi's foreign policy in North Africa.[39]

Only rarely (and reluctantly) does Deeb acknowledge the less irenic motives that drove Libyan policy:

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[38] George Joffé, "Libya--Regional history, regional and national borders," in Libya: State and region, J. Allan and K. McLachlan and M. Buru, ed., (London: SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, 1989), 14.

[39] Deeb 1991, 15.

> A perception of threat, however, is not always enough to explain certain alliances. The Chad merger, for instance, and the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front were also determined to some extent by Libya's desire to extend beyond its borders and increase its power and prestige regionally.[40]

As we shall see in Chapter Five, the 'merger' in question was pursued through multiple invasions and prolonged military occupation of one of the weakest states in the international system. By failing to call a spade a spade, Deeb misses the essence of Libyan national security policy.

Furthermore, Deeb apparently assumes all threat-generated behavior to be rational. This is not at all evident. Slapping a marauding grizzly bear may be a clear response to a threat, but that does not necessarily make it a rational response (i.e., one that is likely to reduce or eliminate the threat posed by the bear).

As for Deeb's assumption that all realists are rational, this is yet another moot proposition. The effect of her assumption is to once again reduce rationality to a question of intent; if an agent intended a given decision to maximize his power then he was rational, irrespective of the consequences. It is difficult for the imagination to conceive of an actor who would not meet, or whose actions could not be interpreted so as to meet, this low standard. Hence, Deeb's notion of rationality tells us remarkably little that is worthwhile.

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[40] Deeb 1991, 126.

In contrast, we argue that Qaddafi's maximalist objectives were not inherently irrational, but that his pursuit of them was, insomuch as the policies he devised to achieve those objectives were consistently counterproductive. Those policies originated not only in a lack of accountability, but in the world view of the Libyan leader.

IV. What makes Qaddafi tick?

To a recent initiate in Libyan studies, this simple question rapidly assumes the proportions of a riddle of the Sphinx. Far too many writers have indulged in the pretense that Qaddafi's thinking somehow defies analysis. For example, Ian Lesser of the RAND Corporation suggests that the vagaries of Libyan policy are such that their analysis is best left to country specialists.[41] At the height of the Reagan administration's confrontations with Libya, another RAND analyst concluded with evident frustration:

> Because he (Qaddafi) does act on principle--based on a purely "Qaddafian" morality--rather than in response to pressure, he cannot be influenced . . . Whether he is irrational, at least by our standards, or whether this is some huge cultural/political misunderstanding seems useless to debate.[42]

Yet Qaddafi is not so inscrutable as these comments suggest. Whether the Libyan leader is an 'Islamic

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[41] Ian Lesser, Security in North Africa: Internal and external challenges, (Santa Monica: RAND, 1993), 2.

[42] Bonnie Cordes, "Qaddafi: Idealist and revolutionary philanthropist," RAND Paper P-7209, (March 1986), 9.

fundamentalist' or 'desert mystic'--tags which place him beyond the pale of comprehension for some--is largely irrelevant.[43] If approached as a statesman, his *weltanschauung* is readily accessible and illuminating.

Qaddafi believes that the Arabs are the victims of numerous historical injustices, many of which were perpetrated during the twentieth century. In addition, because of the specific circumstances behind Libya's emergence into the international community he sees Libyans as an aggrieved people. Together, these beliefs engender truculence, or aggressive defiance of those he deems responsible for the indignities born by his countrymen and fellow Arabs. By his own admission, Qaddafi also has a deep sense of destiny, a conviction that it is his mission in life to redress the injustices born by Libyans and other Arabs by increasing the power of his state.[44] Thus, truculence and a dramatic self-perception are the defining elements of the Libyan leader's world view.

Such an outlook is not atypical for the leader of a developing state. Many in the Third World sympathize with the notion that they have been wronged by the

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[43] A serious political biography of Colonel Qaddafi has yet to be written. Efforts to give him a fair hearing frequently terminate in embarrassing apologetics or hagiography. See, for example, Mirella Bianco's Gadhafi: A voice from the desert, Frederick Muscat's My president, my son, George Tremlett's Gadaffi: The desert mystic, and Musa Kousa's The political leader and his social background: Muammar Qadafi, the Libyan leader.

[44] Musa Kousa, The political leader and his social background: Muammar Qadafi, the Libyan leader, MA Thesis, (Michigan State University, 1978), 143.

Western powers, and the sentiment is especially pronounced in the Arab world. This sense of victimization dates to Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, which produced a crisis of confidence in the Arab world that deepened over the following decades as European domination of the Middle East became an unavoidable reality. In the twentieth century, the Arabs' sense of victimization became acute following the creation of Israel in 1948 and repeated (and humiliating) defeats in the Arab-Israeli wars.

The history of modern Libya accentuated the sense of historical injustice. The brutality of Italian colonialism, which began in 1911. laid the foundation of Libyan nationalism. Libyan guerrillas waged a brave but futile campaign against the modernized Italian forces. By one estimate, 50% of the Cyrenaican populace was eradicated in the course of Italian 'pacification.'[45] Libyans maintain that some 50,000 Libyans died after being forcibly relocated to internment camps in the southern desert, and that a total of some 500,000 of their countrymen died resisting the Italians between 1911 and 1943, with a further 250,000 allegedly forced into exile.[46] Although these figures are undoubtedly inflated by a large factor, the mythology is nevertheless significant. Whatever the historical reality, post-

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[45] Richard Parker, North Africa: Regional tensions and strategic concerns, (New York: Praeger, 1987), 64.

[46] Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, The making of modern Libya, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1.

independence Libyans believed themselves to have suffered horrible atrocities at the hands of the Italians.

The Second World War ultimately brought liberation from the Italians, but afterwards Libya was still subject to foreign military occupation. Many young Libyans were further outraged that their country, upon being granted its independence by the United Nations in 1951, was subsequently ruled by a pro-Western monarchy. The combined weight of these humiliations--real and imagined--turned the North African kingdom into a fertile breeding ground for Arab nationalism. Nasserism flourished.

Thus, to a considerable extent Qaddafi's world view was a reflection of his historical context. It may also have been influenced by the impoverished circumstances of his youth. Qaddafi's family was poor and politically disadvantaged. As a child, Qaddafi's poverty made him a target of ridicule. In the 1980s, psychiatrists working for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency allegedly surmised that these circumstances led Qaddafi to develop an exaggerated Bedouin value system, marked by naive idealism, religious fanaticism, intense pride, austerity, xenophobia, and sensitivity to slight.'[47]

Whether under the thrall of 'Bedouin values' or not, Qaddafi was undeniably bitter about the deprivations of his childhood. While touring the Fezzan (Libya's poorest

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[47] Bob Woodward, Veil: The secret wars of the CIA 1981-1987, (London: Headline Book Publishing PLC, 1987) 94-95.

region) in September 1969 (only days after seizing power), Qaddafi told a crowd:

> In the recent past I was with you as a student in the school nearby. I was subjected then to the same injustice as you suffer today . . . I was denied the sacred right of education as all the sons of Fezzan, and with the extreme injustice done to us all, I feel the same way as you, and will always share your feelings.[48]

Qaddafi immediately took steps to rectify this and other perceived injustices. He defied the Western powers by ejecting British and American forces from Libya, and by nationalizing foreign oil companies. In addition, Qaddafi openly supported Palestinian militancy, shipped arms to the front-line Arab states, and declared that Libya would henceforth hinge its foreign policy to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For Qaddafi, Israel was the ultimate injustice inflicted upon the Arab world by the West. After all, Israel had been the vehicle of Arab humiliation in the wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967. The Jewish state therefore assumed an enormous psychological significance for the young Libyan, an importance which excised it from the realm of normal international relations. In this regard he was not unique; many other Arabs at the time saw Israel in the same terms. (It was precisely to expunge this sense of humiliation and inferiority that Egypt's Anwar Sadat launched the 1973 War, thereby opening the door to peace.) However, long after most Arab leaders

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[48] Muammar El Qaddafi, speech delivered in Sebha on 22 September 1969.

had begun to psychologically accommodate Israel's existence Qaddafi was still consumed by the flames of humiliation.

The motifs of inferiority and victimization permeated his speeches. In his first radio address he spoke of the Arab's 'shattered honor' which he promised to avenge. In a televised interview broadcast a month after he seized power, Qaddafi emphasized:

> Libya in particular and the Arab area in general have been subjected to long centuries of injustice, oppression and slavery through foreign occupation, and social backwardness as a result of reactionary rule and regionalism which has been forcibly imposed on them . . . it was these historical reasons which led up to the revolution in Libya as well as in every other Arab land which had passed through the same conditions.[49]

To his 'backwards' countrymen, as well as to Arabs everywhere, the young Libyan officer brandished the promise of catharsis: 'Arab unity is what will solve all the difficult problems of the Arab nation.' [50]

Qaddafi's conception of Arab unity--a precept espoused by Gamal Abd Al Nasser--was inseparable from his own sense of mission. Notwithstanding his obligatory self-deprecation, the Libyan Colonel made no secret of his conviction that he was destined for more important

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[49] As transcribed in Meredith O. Ansell and Ibrahim Massaud al-Arif, The Libyan revolution: A sourcebook of legal and historical documents, (Harrow, England: Oleander Press, 1972), 79.

[50] How was this unity to be achieved? In a Catch-22 which Qaddafi never fully resolved, unity was held to be both the result of, and a prerequisite for, the liberation of Palestine. Middle East Journal 1970, 216-18.

things than being the leader of a mere two million people. In short, Qaddafi aspired to succeed Nasser as the leader of the Arab world.

There were, however, important differences between the two self-styled revolutionaries. Qaddafi's Nasserism, as one observer noted, 'far transcends anything ever imagined by Gamal Abdel Nasser.'[51] Perhaps this was because, in Fouad Adjami's words, Qaddafi had been spared 'the wounds, the constraints, and the traumas of original Nasserism . . . Because his baggage is light--a small population, a high income--Qaddafi can fly as high as his imagination could take him.'[52]

The young Libyan was never content to be just one more head of state. His philosophical aspirations, embodied in the bombastic Third Universal Theory and The Green Book, were forwarded with little modesty:

> The Green Book is the new gospel. . . . One of its words can destroy the world. Or save it . . . the Third World only needs my Green Book. My word.[53]

Unhappily for Qaddafi, the Third World apparently had other ideas. His political philosophy attracted few followers. Moreover, Libya's neighbors displayed a disturbing indifference to the young Libyan's plans for uniting the Arab states into a single polity--run,

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[51] Sicker 1987, 127.

[52] Fouad Adjami, The Arab predicament, 93.

[53] Oriana Fallaci, "Iranians are our brothers," New York Times Magazine (December 16, 1979): 123; as quoted in Zartman and Kluge 1984, 177.

naturally enough, from Tripoli. Thus, Qaddafi's naked ambition played an important role in repeatedly foiling his bids for unification with other Arab states (and, by extension, scuttling one of his major national security objectives).

The conjunction of these two powerful elements of his world view, truculence and a dramatic self-conception, propelled the Colonel into increasingly extreme (and self-defeating) behaviors such as terrorism. Terrorism brought the regime notoriety, and perhaps some visceral pleasure. Yet its benefits were ephemeral: rather than moving Libya closer to the fulfillment of its strategic goals, terrorism had the opposite effect of turning Libya into an international pariah. Many other Libyan policies had similarly self-defeating consequences.

V. Why were Qaddafi's security policies counterproductive?

In some respects, Libya was a quintessential Third World state: a relatively small power which made its debut as an independent political entity late in the game of nations.[54] Moreover, as previously noted, Tripoli's

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[54] Indeed, post-1969 Libya could serve as an archetype of Barry Buzan's model of unstable Third World states whose weakness begets erratic shifts in relations with their neighbors, and whose rulers rely upon foreign threats to strengthen their own status (Barry Buzan, "People, States, and Fear: The national security problem in the Third World," in National security in the Third World: The management of internal and external threats, ed. Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Moon, [Hants, England: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1988], 32).

professed 'anti-imperialism' was not atypical of Third World states, nor was the regime's resentment of the West (especially its animosity towards the United States and Israel) exceptional for a late twentieth century Arab country. Yet in several regards Libya differed profoundly from other developing states, and it is those differences which make Libya a singularly intriguing case study in Third World security.

Qaddafi's Libya set out to defy the conventional wisdom that held small powers to be 'something more than or different from Great Powers writ small,' a difference that 'generates a substantive difference between the problems and constraints, the alternatives and policy options faced by a small state as opposed to a large one.'[55] To the contrary, Libya thought of itself as a Great Power in gestation, a self-perception made strikingly clear by the fact that Tripoli ascribed to itself a universalist mission, as the Great Powers themselves were wont to do (e.g., the United States and Wilsonian liberalism; the Soviet Union and communism). Libya's mission was to export its 'revolution,' or in other words, to re-make the international order in accordance with Qaddafi's precepts. Thanks to the trappings of the modern totalitarian state, the Colonel was able to turn his personal agenda into a national crusade.

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[55] Robert L. Rothstein, Alliances and small powers, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 1; Efraim Karsh, Neutrality and small states, (London: Routledge, 1988), 4.

Naturally, since Libya did not conceive of itself as a Third World state, it did not view its security in terms befitting its stature. For Qaddafi's Libya, security was nothing less than 'a condition which helps the (Arab) nation to transcend its state of fragmentation through struggle against its enemies.'[56] But in the cold reality of international relations, Arab unity remained an unrealized Xanadu--and aggressive policies purportedly enacted in its behalf were rarely deemed legitimate by the dominant powers in the world system.

Security, no less than the other fundamental ideas which are the concern of social sciences (e.g., power, justice, the state), is a vigorously contested concept.[57] Because security is a measure not just of objective reality but of perception, the meaning of security in its various contexts--personal, societal, national, and international--is inherently nebulous. Of the myriad definitions which have been forwarded, none surpasses for concise elegance that by which security denotes *an absence of threat*.[58] National security therefore denotes an absence of threats, internal and external, to the state. (Policy denotes a course or principle of action

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[56] Said 1986, 265.

[57] An excellent introduction to the rich and varied debate is Barry Buzan's People, States & Fear, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); see also Richard Shultz's "Introduction to International Security," in Security Studies for the 1990s, ed. Richard Shultz, Roy Godson, and Ted Greenwood, (London: Brassey's, 1993).

[58] Lawrence Freedman, ed., War, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

adopted by a government, party, or individual. National security policy therefore consists of *the courses and principles of action adopted and or proposed by a government to produce an absence of external and internal threats to the state.*[59])

In nearly all states, the prerogative of identifying threats and vital national interests belongs to the ruling party; in a totalitarian regime that prerogative often resides with the head of state and his small coterie. So it was in Libya. Qaddafi defined Libya's national security interests in rather expansive terms. Indeed, Qaddafi's notion of Libyan security resembled a Pan-Arab version of the Brezhnev doctrine.[60] Stretching the notion of national security to encompass the entire Arab world was his favorite means of justifying interventionism:

> When the countries around Libya constitute a threat to the security of the Libyan people, this people, in order to defend that security, can resort to force in order to remove the elements that constitute threats to Libyan security. When an Arab territory anywhere is exposed to external aggression it is the duty of the Libyan people . . . to use all their (resources) so as to defend this Arab

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[59] For alternative conceptualizations, see Stephanie G. Neuman, "Defense-planning in less industrialized states: An organizing framework," in Defense planning in less-industrialized states: The Middle East and South Asia, in Stephanie G. Neuman, ed., (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1984), 6-8; Lt.Col. Christopher Shoemaker, Structure, function and the NSC staff: An officer's guide to the National Security Council, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1989) 5-6.

[60] Sicker 1987, 129-130.

> territory, whether they were asked to do so or not.[61]

In the Colonel's parlance, external aggression meant the presence of Western troops or their allies anywhere in the Arab world or Africa. His gratuitous intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict borrowed the same reasoning (the Israelis being imperialist proxies), as illustrated by Qaddafi's self-declared aims in Lebanon:

> We have decided to repel the enemies, or rather we have decided to defeat them finally, the Americans, Israelis, and reactionaries. Therefore, we are exercising the legitimate right of self-defence supported by all laws . . . Thus, when we decide to confront the advance of the American forces that have established bridgeheads on Masirah island, at the port of Berbera, and at Ghardaqah, Marsa Matruh, Cairo West and in Palestine, we are deciding to exercise a legitimate defence in face of an enemy that has penetrated the Arab homeland.[62]

In welcoming Syrian President Hafez al-Assad to Libya he added: 'We have decided to attack the American bases in the Arab homeland; by doing so we would be exercising the right of legitimate defence of our existence in the Arab land.'[63] The Colonel further elaborated his theory of Pan-Arab security in September 1985:

> We support, as of now, the realization of Arab unity by force. . . . Arab unity by force has become necessary
> . . . because our existence without Arab unity is threatened with destruction and extinction. We say that if the world has heard about any violent act to change the Arab map it is a domestic act concerning only the Arabs and is permitted. It is not an invasion or

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[61] SWB ME/6362/A/1, 5 March 1980.

[62] SWB ME/6517/A/1, 8 September 1980.

[63] SWB ME/6519/i, 10 September 1980.

> interference in internal affairs. . . . We support Syria if it annexes Lebanon tomorrow by any method. . . . This is an internal action and a revolution, an internal revolution and not a war between one country and another, and we refuse to discuss it in the UN, the Security Council, the OAU, or in any other level.[64]

Thus, in Qaddafi's mind, Pan-Arab security became the ultimate justification for inter-Arab aggression.

Had Libya been a more powerful state, its pursuit of such an ambitious agenda would have resulted in even more notoriety than the regime otherwise acquired. As it was, the scale of Tripoli's ambitions greatly exceeded the state's stubbornly limited resources, and the regime's inability to bridge the gulf between the two was the principal reason that the state's policies often proved counterproductive. For a superpower to act upon its hegemonic aspirations was one thing, but it was quite another for a comparatively weak power to pursue similar aspirations without apparent regard for international norms or political realities.

Thus, Libya's studied mimicry of the Great Powers--which included numerous external military interventions and the sponsorship of surrogates in a remarkable number of conflicts--proved unsustainable. In the end the constraints of small power status prevailed, showing that neither oil wealth nor military hardware do necessarily Great Power status impart.

This tension between ends and means echoed deeper contradictions between the objectives themselves. These

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[64] Sicker 1987, 129.

contradictions became particularly pronounced during Libya's clashes with the United States in the 1980s. Rhetoric notwithstanding, Qaddafi did not want to enter a pitched battle with the United States. On the other hand, he obviously relished the deluge of media attention that came each time he squared off with the Reagan administration. Unfortunately for the Libyan leader, he could not have his cake and eat it too. He had to make choices, and in the heat of the moment, the choices made often undercut his own long term goals.

These conflicting values reflected a transcendent duality in modern Arab society, a duality eloquently summed up by Fouad Ajami:

> To deal with the predicament of their place in the world, the losers in the world system have alternated between the quest for the Occident's power and success and the desire to retreat to their own universe, to try to find their own values, to rebel and say no (to the West) . . . hence the incoherence and breakdown of so many Third World societies.[65]

Thus, the quest for Arab power was psychologically indivisible from the rejection of the existing international order--they were two sides of the same coin. But as Ajami points out, the two impulses could not be easily reconciled. More often than not, the attempt to follow both impulses produced chaos. In like fashion, Libyan national security policy--riven by inconsistent values, and torn between the regime's

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[65] Fouad Ajami, The Arab predicament, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 199).

objectives and its limited resources--collapsed under the weight of its internal contradictions.

VI. A word on methodology

Studies of Libya face formidable methodological limitations. Libya is a closed society; little verifiable information about the internal deliberations of its leaders escapes its borders. The situation is no better, however, for researchers working inside the country where information about security is still difficult (and dangerous) to obtain.[66] This problem is by no means unique to Libya. Scholars have dealt with similar difficulties in studying security policies in closed societies ranging from the former Soviet Union to Iraq. Good scholarship can nevertheless be produced under these conditions, particularly if one asks questions whose answers can be had through sound analysis rather than through access to some gnostic trove. Insomuch as this study focuses on broad policy strokes and their consequences, rather than on the policy making process *per se*, the relative scarcity of Libyan sources is less consequential than one might at first imagine.

Speeches, interviews, and other statements by Libyan authorities constitute primary sources. In addition, reports and editorials in publications of the Jamahiriyah

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[66] Maja Naur, "The military and the labor force in Libya," Current research on peace and violence 4 (1981), 89.

News Agency (JANA) receive official sanction and serve as primary sources.

If the quality of the sources is imperfect, such limitations are intrinsic to the study of international relations. The primary contribution of this thesis is not that it unearths new documents but that it focuses on an area of Libyan history which has not hitherto been analyzed. At the very least, this study should serve as a point of departure for future historians with greater access to primary sources.

VII. Chapter Summary

The first four chapters of this thesis chart the course of Libyan national security policy through four distinct periods: The Nasser era, 1969-1973; the Sadat era, 1974-1980; the Reagan era, 1981-1988; and the Post-Cold War era, 1989-1994. Each of these periods was distinguished by a pronounced conflict or shift in Tripoli's security policy, and it is perhaps no coincidence that this periodization roughly corresponds to what Qaddafi himself perceived as four distinct phases of U.S.-Libyan relations.[67]

Chapter 1, From coup to the politics of confrontation, 1969-1973, charts the radical transformation of Libyan national security policy

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[67] SWB ME/1785/MED/20, 4 September 1993; see also Jalloud's comment, SWB ME/1540 A/1-A/3, 17 November 1992; cf. Mary-Jane Deeb's economic periodization: rentier state, 1961-69; revolutionary state, 1969-73; state in transition, 1973-75; socialist state, 1976-80; state in crisis, 1980-86.

following the end of the Sanusi monarchy. Qaddafi's junta adopted a pro-Egyptian orientation, severed its military ties with the United States and Great Britain, and wantonly involved itself in the Arab-Israeli conflict (including support of Palestinian terrorism). It also launched a militarization campaign which supersaturated the armed forces with weaponry they could not absorb. The regime also formulated a truculent security policy in Africa and the Mediterranean. Expansionist claims were staked to the Gulf of Sirte and to the Aouzou Strip. Notwithstanding its petulance Libya enjoyed the indulgence of the Great Powers, which tried to accommodate a realignment they believed was inevitable.

Chapter 2, **From alliance to antagonism: Aggravating the Libyan security predicament, 1974-1980**, unearths a consistent pattern of counterproductivity in Qaddafi's regional alliance-building endeavors. The foremost example is the deterioration in relations with Egypt after the 1973 War, a degradation driven by Qaddafi's megalomania. After climaxing in a brief border war in 1977, relations sank back into mutual suspicion and hostility. Elsewhere Qaddafi's quest for an ally followed the same pattern of courtship, recrimination and subversion, and alienation. Globally, Qaddafi's security policy was equally self-defeating. He answered American restraint, particularly notable under the Carter administration, with spite. He vehemently opposed U.S. foreign policy in the Near East, setting himself against

Camp David and the inexorable expansion of American military influence in the region, especially the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force. Last but not least, Qaddafi affixed his seal to a wide range of terrorist movements.

Chapter 3, **Vacillation, confrontation, and humiliation: Qaddafi and Reagan, 1981-1988**, analyzes Qaddafi's turbulent relations with the Reagan administration. Though faced with a hostile and more powerful antagonist, Qaddafi steadily inched towards the Soviet Union. His tactic backfired. Cozying up to Moscow was the worst way to placate Reagan, and his pro-Soviet overtures failed to elicit a defensive commitment from the Kremlin, with well-known consequences.

Qaddafi's mistake was not so much his failure to conclude an alliance with the USSR as his insistence on single-handedly confronting a vastly more powerful state. Libya's regional isolation was further assured by the invasion of Chad and continued efforts to destabilize neighboring states. By any standard, Qaddafi's behavior was aggressive and threatening. By the standard of his self-declared objectives, it was also counterproductive and thus irrational.

Chapter 4, **Denouement: Qaddafi's Jamahiriya in the New World Order, 1989-1994**, examines the nadir of Libyan national security policy in the post-Cold War international order. Qaddafi was appalled at the realities of the New World Order: the collapse of the

Soviet Union left him without so much as a nominal patron, while the Gulf War and the Middle East Peace Process expanded Washington's regional influence to new heights. In times which demanded pragmatism Qaddafi made only half-hearted attempts to rehabilitate his country's image. Libya kept a low profile during the Gulf War and relinquished its long-standing claim to Chad's Aouzou Strip. However, these belated attempts at reformation came to naught once investigators concluded Libya was culpable for the Lockerbie bombing. UN Security Council sanctions soon followed.

Amazingly, even when shackled by sanctions Qaddafi refused to extricate Libyan security policy from the realm of irrationality. He defied demands to end his support of terrorism. His claims to the Gulf of Sirte remained unchanged. Development of chemical weapons continued unabated. The result was international isolation and containment. By 1994 Qaddafi had conspicuously failed to achieve any of his national security objectives and had in fact regressed on most fronts.

Chapter 5, **Chad: Qaddafi's Vietnam**, describes Libya's only protracted military campaign. Libya's prolonged interference in Chad was an exercise in expansionism and adventurism which Qaddafi baldly tried to justify in terms of Libyan security. This chapter demonstrates that Libya fomented the very instability at which it feigned alarm. Stripped of its putative

justification, Libya's invasion of Chad is correctly viewed as incontrovertible evidence of the threat posed to regional security by Qaddafi's regime. Fortunately for the Chadians, Qaddafi did not anticipate that his field experiment in realpolitik would provide Egypt, France, the Sudan and the United States with an arena for waging a proxy-war with Tripoli. The influx of foreign aid and the ineptitude of the Libyan armed forces put a decisive end to Qaddafi's sub-Saharan ambitions.

Chapter 6, **Regime Security**, analyzes the most successful element of Libyan national security policy. Qaddafi's skill in snuffing out internal threats, combined with a measure of luck, proved effective. Nonetheless, policy passed into the realms of extremism here as well. The infamous "stray dogs" campaign generated widespread opprobrium and eventually led to Libya's international isolation.

Finally, the gulf between Qaddafi's ambitions and reality is revisited. Far from transforming his state into a regional superpower, Qaddafi left Libya vulnerable politically and militarily. The country's pariah status, the marginal effectiveness of its armed forces, its vast territory and considerable oil wealth left it a ripe target for neighbors tempted to divert attention from domestic troubles.

Conclusion

To summarize, this study proposes a refined, and hopefully more useful, conception of rational/irrational behavior--one that has relevancy to the world as it exists in fact, rather than in theory. By contrasting the results of Libyan behavior with the regime's self-declared and inferred national security objectives, it reveals a consistent pattern of counterproductive behavior. Moreover, it explains the origins of this behavior and shows why it ultimately proved to be self-defeating. As the only extant study of Libyan national security policy, it thus fills an important gap in our understanding of contemporary Libya while serving as a useful case study of national security policy in the Third World.

Chapter 1

From coup to the politics of confrontation, 1969-1973

> *From this day forward, Libya is a free self-governing republic. . . . (we must) prepare to face the enemies of Islam, the enemies of humanity, those who have burned our sanctuaries and mocked at our honor. Thus shall we rebuild our glory, we shall resurrect our heritage, we shall avenge our wounded dignity, and restore the rights which have been wrested from us.*
>
> -- Muammar El Qaddafi,
> 1 September 1969.

The leader of every nation faces a security dilemma which can be summarized in three questions: How is the security of the state to be defined? What level of security will the state seek? How will it be achieved?

The answers a state formulates to these questions depend on factors such as the state's history, its form of government, its values, and most importantly its comparative power to shape the international environment. Obviously, states which rank among the Great Powers have a correspondingly greater latitude in answering these questions and may arrogate unto themselves global security interests. But for the majority of states created in the twentieth century, the parameters within which their governments must address the security dilemma are fairly narrow. Such states must seek to protect themselves from interference by the Great Powers as well as from neighboring states while simultaneously pursuing

development with limited resources. This permutation of the universal security dilemma is the Third World security predicament.[1]

On the first day of September, 1969, Libyans awoke to a new government (or at least the incipient stages of a new government) which, disdainful of the security policies pursued by the monarchy it replaced, set about formulating its own responses to Libya's unique iteration of the Third World security predicament. Internal security was, befittingly, the new regime's foremost preoccupation, and in the following months a bevy of policies were crafted to consolidate the government's control over the country. These policies aimed to dismember the old power structure and legitimize the new order, which rapidly took on authoritarian hues. Security became the justification for disallowing dissent and neutralizing actual and potential rivals, thereby shielding the country's leadership from political pressures. The lack of accountability created by these policies was an essential precursor for irrationality.[2]

The new regime concluded that a multi-faceted strategic reorientation was needed to address the

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[1] See Mohammed Ayoob, The Third World security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system (London: Lynne Rienner, 1995). See also Muthiah Alagappa, The national security of developing states: Lessons from Thailand (Dover, Massachusetts, Auburn House Publishing Company, 1987), and Edward Azar and Chung in moon, eds., National security in the Third World: The management of internal and external threats (Hants, England: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1988).

[2] The dynamics of accountability are explored in greater detail in Chapter Six, "The Primacy of Internal Security."

external dimension of Libya's national security predicament. Defining the existing international order as threatening, the Libyan leadership made the achievement of security contingent upon effecting a change in the regional balance of power--above all, by contributing to the military defeat of Israel. This necessarily pitted Tripoli against the Western powers which, rightly or wrongly, were perceived as Israel's allies. Thus, the *ancien régime's* military links with the United States and the United Kingdom were severed: bases were closed, troops expelled, and training missions terminated. In their stead an intimate yet informal alliance was forged with Egypt. In addition, the Libyan Armed Forces (LAF) were reorganized, expanded and modernized in preparation for the anticipated reckoning with Israel.

The unifying thread woven throughout the fabric of this new national security policy was the world view of Libya's young head of state. Although there was nothing extraordinary in Muammar Qaddafi's desire to improve Libya's standing in the international order, it quickly became apparent that he conceptualized himself and his state in terms that sat in poor juxtaposition to the country's limited resources. By late 1973 the assertion of this world view, coupled with the lack of legal or political checks on Qaddafi's power, nudged Libyan national security policy towards the realm of self-defeating behavior.

Qaddafi ascendant

The coup d'etat led by Lieutenant Muammar El Qaddafi on September 1, 1969, could serve as a textbook example of the genre.[3] Credit for its success must go to Qaddafi, whose charisma and force of will made him an able conspirator. So too did his patience. Qaddafi began organizing his friends into seditious cells while still in secondary school; he then persuaded friends to join him in attending Libya's fledgling military academy for the express purpose of assisting his future plot.[4] He dubbed his followers the 'Free Unionist Officers' in homage to the Egyptian model of 1952. Within the movement's innermost ring, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), Qaddafi achieved psychological dominance over his comrades by reserving to himself full knowledge of the conspiracy's membership and plans.[5]

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[3] Though he appropriated the rank of Colonel after taking power, Qaddafi was either demoted from captain or denied promotion to that rank just prior to the coup d'etat. While on a training run he allegedly shoved a straggling soldier to the ground and allowed the remainder of the company to trample him. The injured soldier was hospitalized for ten days. Salah El Saadany, Egypt and Libya from inside, 1969-1976 (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 57; cf. Mohamed Heikal, The road to Ramadan, (London: Collins, 1975) 70. Other allegations implicated Qaddafi in the brutal murder of the Benghazi Military Academy commander in 1963 and in the murder of a fellow cadet (D. Blundy and Andrew Lycett, Qaddafi and the Libyan revolution [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987], 46, 48).

[4] "Interview of Colonel Muammar Al-Qaddafi on UAR Television, 14 October 1969," as reproduced in Meredith O. Ansell and Ibrahim Massaud Al-Arif, The Libyan revolution: A sourcebook of legal and historical documents (Harrow, England: Oleander Press, 1972), 79.

[5] Blundy and Lycett, 57.

The years of secrecy and patience paid off. Despite evidence that the authorities were on to their plot the conspirators achieved complete tactical surprise; within 24 hours they had arrested most senior army and police officials, including Abdel Aziz El Shalhi, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Major-General Sanoussi, the Chief of Staff, and Major-General Taleb, director of internal security.[6] Mid-level officers were not given an opportunity to rally resistance: some 40 colonels, 75 lieutenant colonels and 150 majors were also arrested.[7]

The Libyan monarch, King Idris Sanusi, based his security on the premise that tribal loyalties were of greater strength than patriotism in the developing Libyan state.[8] The palace organized the armed forces into three nominally unified regional militia but was careful to weight the balance of power in favor of the King's home province. The regular army (to which Qaddafi pertained) had only 6500 men and was little more than a gendarmerie when compared to these three forces: the Cyrenaican

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[6] Shalhi avoided capture for a few hours by hiding in his swimming pool. He and his brother are believed to have been planning a coup of their own: an amusing but apocryphal tale claims that when soldiers arrested him in his bed he snapped: 'Go away, you fools. It's not today, it's the fourth' (as related in Ruth First, Libya: The elusive revolution [Middlesex, England: 1974], 99).

[7] Paul Martin, "Libya after the revolution: A time to wait and see," Times (London), 29 January 1970. Hereafter all references to the Times refer to the London newspaper.

[8] The King's fall did not necessarily invalidate that proposition, as his failure may well have been one of political ability rather than sociological misdiagnosis. In point of fact, Qaddafi later emulated the King's tribal patronage system.

Defence Force (CYDEF), the Tripolitanian Defence Force (TRIDEF), and a small force in the Fezzan. Their strengths were 8000, 4200, and 600 men respectively.[9] CYDEF was the strongest force not only in terms of manpower but in equipment; its arsenal surpassed that of the regular army.[10]

Consequently, CYDEF headquarters--located at the Gurnada camp near Beida--was the nerve center of the monarchy's security. The eastern province of Cyrenaica had been the stronghold of the Sanusi movement for over a century, and the King depended upon the loyalty of Cyrenaican tribes for his protection. This tribal bloc included the Ebedat, the Al-Hassa, the Al-Derisa, the Al-Awagir and most importantly the Barassa.[11] These tribes provided the bulk of administrators in the Sanusi government. But rivalries between these tribes provided a chink Qaddafi could exploit. Since the Barassa were the most loyal to the King, Qaddafi recruited a man from the rival Al Hassa tribe to storm the CYDEF headquarters. The man he chose, Lieutenant Colonel Musa Ahmed, was assisted by the duty officer at the camp, Captain Abdullah Shuayb, who also belonged to the Al Hassa.

Brigadier General Sanusi Fezzani, commander of the CYDEF,

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[9] As authoritative figures are unavailable, these numbers represent the best available estimates. Area handbook for Libya, (GPO: Washington D.C., 1969), 263; cf. "Solomon might know what to do," Economist 15 November 1969.

[10] Ansell and Al-Arif, 81.

[11] First, 78-79.

was found asleep at home and taken into custody.[12]

With CYDEF neutralized, the TRIDEF and Fezzani forces were coopted without difficulty. (Before being captured, the commanding officer of TRIDEF tried to convince British technicians training his force in the use of the Vigilant missile to ready the missiles for launch. This bizarre request would seem to indicate that the militia had little or no information about the foe it faced.[13]) Senior officers who were not arrested were nevertheless warned to stay in their homes.[14]

Though Qaddafi broadcast news of the coup d'etat from Benghazi, it was not until additional infantry and armored car units entered the Cyrenaican capital on September 4 that the city was finally secured.[15] The delay in seizing Libya's second city was an unforeseen complication (the local cell leader got cold feet and refused to carry out his part of the conspiracy) which could have unravelled the entire plot.[16] Tobruk was the last city to fall by virtue of its distance from the

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[12] First, 108-109.

[13] First, 110.

[14] Paul Martin, "Senior officers warned to stay at home," Times, 3 September 1969.

[15] "Libyan junta says Soviet fleet scared off U.K. intervention," International Herald Tribune, 5 September 1969; according to Wright, continuous small arms fire was heard in Benghazi for most of the first 24 hours (John Wright, Libya: A modern history [London: Croom Helm, 1981], 130).

[16] Qaddafi was furious. George Tremlett, "Gadaffi: The desert mystic," (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1993), 133; "Libyan regime may still not be in control," Guardian, 6 September 1969, 2.

coup's epicenter. By September 10, the RCC was satisfied that it had the police in tow, and ordered all civilians possessing firearms to turn them in at police stations or face severe penalties. A curfew was enforced at night. The coup had succeeded with virtually no bloodshed: only one soldier is known to have died fighting for the monarchy.[17]

Why did no one else resist the conspiracy? In part because of the absence of King Idris Sanusi, who had been in Turkey for several weeks accompanied by his senior cabinet officials. (This lesson was not lost on Qaddafi, who over time proved increasingly reluctant to venture outside of Libya). Nevertheless, the RCC was troubled by the fact that King Idris was not in custody. Qaddafi feared that the King might persuade the United States or Britain to orchestrate a countercoup from the military bases both powers maintained in Libya.[18] Forestalling this possibility became the new Libyan leader's first national security objective. Qaddafi's fears were at least partially warranted. King Idris promptly entreated British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart (through his Palace Affairs Minister, Omar Al-Shalhi) to reinstate him. Shalhi made a similar demarche to the Americans.[19]

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[17] Fifteen defenders of the monarchy were allegedly wounded at Gurnada (Blundy and Lycett, 59). According to Wright, there was more resistance than the RCC ever admitted (Wright, 130).

[18] Clare Hollingworth, "Non-alignment, Libyan style," Daily Telegraph, 23 December 1969.

[19] P. Edward Haley, Qaddafi and the United States since 1969 (New York: Praeger, 1984), 22.

But the King's pleas fell on ears deafened by a din of Cold War interests. The Americans were wary of swimming against a tide of Arab nationalism and unenthusiastic at the prospect of employing force on behalf of a non-democratic regime. In fact, two years earlier U.S. Ambassador David Newsom explicitly warned King Idris that the United States was not prepared to defend his regime against internal revolt.[20] This attitude reflected a weariness with nationalist struggles (not least the war in Vietnam) which had tempered Washington's appetite for foreign intervention. The British were similarly reluctant to take unilateral action after the Suez fiasco of 1956. Thus, the prevailing wisdom in both capitals was that though the demise of the Sanusi regime was regrettable, restoring the throne would entail more difficulty than it was worth.

Predictably, the West was mainly concerned with keeping Libya outside of the Soviet camp; the prevalent attitude at the time was that one despot was as good as another so long as he toed the anti-Soviet line. Far from opposing the RCC, Western intelligence agencies tried to curry favor with it. Of three known royalist plots which were hatched over the next three years, at least one failed because the CIA alerted Qaddafi to the danger.[21] The British foiled another. In 1970 Libyan

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[20] Haley, 22.

[21] "Aid to Qaddafi in '71 charged," New York Times, 22 December 1983.

royalists prevailed upon Colonel David Stirling, founder of the Special Air Service (SAS), to draw up plans for an invasion. He duly drafted a scheme for a seaborne assault on Tripoli from Malta, using mercenaries recruited from the SAS and other special forces units. Although the plan had financial backing from wealthy Libyans in exile (notably Omar Al-Shalhi), it too was quashed by the British government.[22]

However, Qaddafi and his co-conspirators were unsure that the Western powers would not attempt to restore the king to his throne, either to maintain control of Libya's substantial oil resources or to deny the USSR a potential satellite. The RCC feared that Britain might justify intervention by invoking its treaty commitments to defend Libya against external aggression. Thus, RCC units nervously took up positions around the U.S. and British bases. Qaddafi also took the more practical precaution of telling the Western powers what they wanted to hear. Within hours the new government pledged to honor all extant treaties, including oil concessions.[23] Given the rapidity with which this promise was broken, it was obviously fabricated to assuage U.S. and British concerns and thus avert foreign intervention.

The mist of confusion which shrouded the following days was made thicker by the RCC's furtiveness. Officers

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[22] "Whitehall vetoed plot to carry out raid on Libya," Times, 14 May 1973.

[23] "Libyan regime's promise to stand by its treaties," Guardian, 3 September 1969, 3.

refused to give their names to foreign correspondents and diplomats. Diplomats at the British embassy dealt with the RCC through an officer in a raincoat whom they nicknamed 'Colonel Mackintosh' since he would not identify himself.[24] Journalists were forbidden, upon pain of 'severe punishment,' to photograph members of the RCC, military installations or troop movements.[25]

Qaddafi's identity remained the strictest secret of all for the first few days. This secrecy bought him time to establish control over the country before revealing himself and his agenda. A royalist challenge could not be effectively mounted if the King's supporters were unsure who their opponent was. RCC members claimed their leader was Colonel Saad al-Din Bushweir, who was subsequently described as the new Chief of Staff.[26] It later emerged that he was not even in Libya at the time of the coup.[27] A week passed before Arab diplomats in Tunis began to realize that Qaddafi was the man in charge.[28] On September 8, Qaddafi finally entered the limelight and promoted himself to commander-in-chief of

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[24] Author's interview with retired British diplomat, November 1994.

[25] Edward Mortimer, "Libya curb on photographers," Times, 11 September 1969.

[26] Paul Martin, "Senior officers warned to stay at home," Times, 3 September 1969; "Tanks in Benghazi as Junta begins to meet opposition," Guardian, 5 September 1969.

[27] First, 112.

[28] Edward Mortimer, "Libya curb on photographers," Times, 11 September 1969.

the Libyan armed forces (LAF).

Despite its infancy, the new government displayed a surprising sophistication in dealing with the superpowers. The USSR, eager to expand its influence in North Africa, made overtures to the new regime within 48 hours of the coup d'etat, offering arms shipments while Western governments were still puzzling over who was in charge. The RCC politely declined the Soviet offer and leaked news of its forbearance, thereby placating the Western powers whose troops were still in the RCC's backyard. The RCC was equally deft in handling the Soviets. On September 4, Tripoli radio reported that the United Kingdom had ruled out forcibly restoring the monarchy due to the Soviet Mediterranean Eskadra, which was conducting exercises off the Libyan shores.[29] In fact, the Soviet naval presence was sheer coincidence. Nonetheless, the RCC's praise was a clever means of mollifying the Soviets after spurning their arms offer.

The new government soon received diplomatic recognition from the major powers, none of whom wished to be left in the cold once the fledgling regime settled down to business. Clearing the recognition hurdle was a major accomplishment for Qaddafi and his band insomuch as it greatly diminished the odds of foreign intervention to restore the monarchy. Having at least temporarily staved off that threat, the RCC's foremost security priority

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[29] "Libyan Junta says Soviet fleet scared off U.K. intervention," International Herald Tribune, 5 September 1969.

became reinforcing its control over the country, or as Qaddafi put it, to consolidate the revolution.[30] To this end the RCC began to methodically dismember the old power structure, in particular by disenfranchising the tribal bloc which formed the principal support of the Sanusi regime. Qaddafi proved adept at dismantling the monarchy; indeed, the end of the Sanusi order may be regarded by future historians as Qaddafi's principal political legacy.[31]

Under King Idris, at least half of all mid-level and senior Libyan officials were tribal leaders or appointees.[32] Many were caught by the first wave of arrests during the coup.[33] Those who escaped arrest were soon forced to retire or farmed out to insignificant civil service or diplomatic posts. The result was that the bureaucracies were soon depleted of many of their most experienced minds. In addition, these purges ushered in a minor sociological upheaval. With few exceptions the officers in the RCC hailed from minor tribes which dwelt in the Libyan interior and comprised

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[30] SWB ME/0583/A/4, 10 October 1989.

[31] Richard Parker, North Africa: Regional tensions and strategic concerns, (New York: Praeger, 1987), 74.

[32] Helen Metz, ed., Libya: A country study, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 264-265; Jonathan Bearman, Qadhafi's Libya (London: Zed Books, 1986), 56.

[33] Omar El Fathaly and Monte Palmer, Political development and social change in Libya (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1980), 57.

the country's lowest economic stratum.[34] Purging the government of appointees from the wealthy coastal tribes was therefore a singularly satisfying experience for these young men.[35] Even Qaddafi made no secret of the fact that he relished the chance to avenge himself of the humiliations he suffered as a youth because of his penury.[36]

Within the armed forces a parallel purge took place over the next six months, and the upper echelons of the army were culled completely. Not a single general or colonel kept his job, and nearly 100 lower ranking officers were forced into retirement.[37] Preparations for this purge had begun months before the coup d'etat, when Qaddafi ordered his conspirators to prepare intelligence profiles of all senior officers.[38] Officers who (like Qaddafi himself) had undergone training in the West were considered particularly suspect. The case of the Libyan air force, where roughly half of the pilots were grounded for political reasons, was illustrative:

> Most senior officers were removed from flying status because they had attended staff colleges in the U.S. and were considered too pro-Western by the new regime. Some were jailed and others

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[34] Bearman, 57.

[35] First, 115.

[36] Lisa Anderson, The state and social transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 261.

[37] Metz, 264.

[38] First, 104.

given non-sensitive staff jobs.[39]

As a result, it was hard to find any officer over the age of 30; the new air force commander, Saleh al-Farjani, was a typical 27.[40] Notwithstanding the purge, the Libyan air force remained well disposed to America. In addition to their American training, the lack of an air force officer in the RCC may have created a sense of estrangement from the new regime.[41] By one account, Libyan fliers feared they would be absorbed into the Egyptian air force.[42]

In tandem with the purges the RCC began restructuring the armed forces. CYDEF and TRIDEF units were dissolved and absorbed into the regular army after being screened for loyalty.[43] Some 800 Libyan troops sent to the Suez Canal region by King Idris were quietly recalled in March 1970 so that they too could be reabsorbed.[44]

The RCC was not content with reducing the influence of certain tribes. Tribalism itself was a heresy in the gospel of Arab nationalism, an anachronism that Qaddafi's

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[39] Edward H. Kolcum, "Arab pilots to train at Wheelus," Aviation Week & Space Technology (23 March 1970): 15.

[40] ibid., 15.

[41] Jesse Lewis Jr., "Winds of change whistle across Wheelus runways," Washington Post, 21 January 1970, 14.

[42] Kolcum, 15.

[43] "The Libyan revolution in the words of its leaders," Middle East Journal 24, no. 2 (Spring 1970): 219.

[44] Clare Hollingworth, "Libyans pull out of Suez," Sunday Telegraph, 15 March 1970.

Young Turks decided to abolish. This could only be accomplished by radically changing the fabric of traditional Libyan society. The RCC therefore introduced a number of fundamental reforms. Tribes were no longer recognized as legal institutions.[45] Administrative areas, which under the monarchy had been little more than tribal enclaves, had their boundaries carefully redrawn to enervate tribal controls.[46] Local government was placed in the hands of young technocrats rather than left to traditional sheikhs.

Tribalism, however, proved more resilient than the RCC had imagined. The sheikhs reasserted their authority by covertly organizing resistance to the government's reforms. By 1973 the RCC conceded defeat and replaced the technocrats with a structure more amenable to tribal interests. A survey of the defeated technocrats revealed an overwhelming consensus (91.7%) that tribalism was the primary cause of their policy failures.[47]

Just as the RCC's rejection of the existing order betrayed the humble origins of its members, so too did the RCC's preoccupation with establishing its legitimacy reveal a profound sense of insecurity. Lacking a democratic mandate, the Council tried sundry means of impressing its legitimacy upon the populace. Enforced Arabization, the partial imposition of Islamic law, the

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[45] El Fathaly and Palmer, 58.

[46] ibid., 75.

[47] ibid., 84.

deportation of the Italian citizenry and the confiscation of their assets, the termination of foreign basing rights and the ceaseless rhetoric of the state propaganda machine were all attempts to reappropriate a 'legitimate' national identity.

As Qaddafi became recognized as the *primus inter pares* in the RCC, the search for legitimacy quite naturally began to adhere in him. The government emphasized his piety and Bedouin roots, portraying Qaddafi as the personification of the 'revolution,' which in turn supposedly embodied the will of the Libyan people.[48] Qaddafi played the role of Libyan Everyman with zeal, a role which facilitated reshaping the national identity in his own image.[49]

In the short term, however, Qaddafi's retinue presented more immediate threats to his survival than did the prospect of popular revolt. The regime's first internal security crisis occurred a mere four months after the September coup. Lieutenant Colonels Adam El Hawaz and Musa Ahmed, Ministers of Defence and the Interior respectively, were arrested for plotting to invite the other members of the RCC to a dinner where the two could poison or arrest them. After 'confessing' under duress, the two were tried and sentenced to imprisonment. Following contrived 'popular' protests at

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[48] Ansell and Al-Arif, 83.

[49] André Martel, La Libye 1835-1990: Essai de géopolitique historique (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 1991), 193; Anderson, 260.

the lightness of their sentences, the two were retried and condemned to death. The death sentences were later commuted.

The existence of any anti-RCC plot was dubious, and it may well be that the El Hawaz affair originated in less dramatic circumstances. There was, for example, bad blood between El Hawaz and the Egyptian military attaché, Salah El Saadany. According to the latter, the distinguished El Hawaz was visibly annoyed by the need to play second string to the youthful Qaddafi and engaged in suspicious activities.[50] But El Hawaz and Mussa Ahmed reportedly opposed the pervasive Egyptian presence which Qaddafi had invited into the country (and which El Saadany represented), which casts the Egyptian's distrust in a different light.[51] Whatever El Hawaz's sentiments towards Cairo, there were other forces at work. Shortly before his arrest, El Hawaz was touted by *Africa Report* as Qaddafi's leading--and more urbane--rival.[52] Qaddafi may have concocted the alleged plot simply to divest himself of a potential challenger.

The El Hawaz incident was significant not for its own sake but because it led to the codification of the proposition that the RCC had to answer to no one except itself; such lack of accountability set the stage for the

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[50] El Saadany, 30.

[51] "Libyan reshuffle," Africa Report (March 1970): 4.

[52] Charles Brown, "The Libyan revolution sorts itself out," Africa Report (December 1969): 12-15.

formulation of increasingly radical policies. Qaddafi used the alleged plot as a pretext for enacting draconian security clauses in the provisional constitution, clauses which authorized the RCC to jail anyone it deemed hostile to the 'revolution.'[53] Article 18 of an RCC decree issued December 11, 1969, stipulated:

> The Revolutionary Command Council is the highest authority in the Libyan Arab Republic . . . In this capacity it may take any measures deemed necessary for the protection of the Revolution as well as the regime . . . Measures adopted by the Revolutionary Command Council may not be challenged before any body.

Extraordinary as this declaration of unaccountability was, the RCC's drift towards authoritarianism was discernible even before the El Hawaz affair. On October 16, 1969, Qaddafi squelched any prospects of organized political opposition, declaring 'after the first of September, he who engages in party activities commits treason.' The following day the Interior Minister confirmed that political parties were permanently banned.[54] Anyone taking up arms against the 'revolution' would be sentenced to death.[55] Curbs on labor unions and the press were quickly implemented as well.

Removing El Hawaz from office enabled Qaddafi to appropriate the defence portfolio, which he never again relinquished. His friend Abu Bakr Yunis Jabir became the Armed Forces Chief of Staff and was relegated to

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[53] Africa Report (March 1970): 5.

[54] Middle East Journal 1970, 206.

[55] Ansell and Al-Arif, 108-113.

predominantly ceremonial and administrative duties. The Egyptian military attaché discovered that Abu Bakr could not give any orders without Qaddafi's approval.[56] This prohibition soon expanded to other RCC members who presumed to involve themselves in security planning:

> I (El Saadany) inquired of Qaddafi whether members of the government other than himself had the authority to move Egyptian forces within Libya or bring additional forces from Egypt. He indicated that not a single Egyptian soldier should be moved or brought into Libya without his personal approval.[57]

Another attempt to topple the fledgling regime occurred in July 1970. Prince Abdullah Abid Sanusi, a nephew of the deposed King who had a long-standing alliance with Omar El Shalhi, devised a plan to invade the Fezzan (the southern Libyan desert) from Chad. Word of the plot was leaked to the regime, an advance party was arrested having scarcely set foot inside Libya, and the uprising sputtered out.[58] Twenty plotters stood trial and an additional 400-500 police and military officers of the *ancien régime* were detained. Perhaps because of the magnitude of the scheme the RCC tread carefully. Most suspects were let off lightly and none of those condemned to death were actually executed.[59]

Benghazi, the old Sanusi stronghold, was a hotbed of

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[56] El Saadany, 40.

[57] ibid., 46.

[58] "Royalist coup uncovered," Times, 25 July 1970.

[59] Lillian Craig Harris, Libya: Qadhafi's revolution and the modern state (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 18.

anti-Egyptian and anti-RCC sentiment; in May 1970 a plot with tribal overtones was unearthed there (perhaps thanks to Egyptian intelligence) among army and police officials.[60] A Baathist plot was crushed in September of the same year and sabotage of Qaddafi's plane detected the next month.[61]

Tensions lurked beneath the veneer of control. Splits within the RCC forced a cabinet reorganization in late 1970.[62] Qaddafi forbade RCC members to travel abroad without his personal authorization. In November, on the eve of signing an agreement to form a federation with Egypt, the RCC ordered that telephone lines be cut and wireless radios removed from army units near Tripoli, leaving them incommunicado. This startling precaution was thought necessary to prevent officers who objected to the unification scheme from taking action.[63] Rumors of attempted assassination were frequent and Qaddafi's guests were thus surprised that his personal security arrangements appeared haphazard and lax.[64]

Journalists seized on one such rumor circulating in Rabat in July 1972 (relations with Morocco were severed

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[60] First, 118; El Saadany, 46.

[61] El Saadany, 23.

[62] "Libya: Nasser's defeat," An-Nahar Arab Report, 21 September 1970.

[63] "Libyan struggle for power," International Herald Tribune, 30 November 1970.

[64] e.g., Philip Norman, "The thundering silence of Colonel Gadhafi," Sunday Times, 3 September 1972.

in 1971 after Qaddafi prematurely applauded an attempt to depose King Hassan) that Qaddafi had been deposed by Jalloud, who had announced the formation of a new cabinet.[65] These reports were only partially correct: though there had indeed been a power struggle within the RCC, it soon became evident that Qaddafi was still in control and in fact had emerged stronger than ever. The cabinet reorganization reflected Qaddafi's determination to ease out other potential adversaries, most of whom were fellow army officers. Consequently, Qaddafi demanded a civilian cabinet which disenfranchised many RCC members; in the end only Major Jalloud and Major Abdul-Moneim al-Houni represented the military.[66] Though in theory Qaddafi was still only the chairman of the RCC, he now exercised complete control over the council and, by extension, over Libya itself.

Qaddafi's repeated resignations created further confusion for foreign observers. The first such resignation came on September 11, 1971. Coincidentally, the following week Qaddafi's motor convoy was involved in a traffic accident after a truck careened into two of his motorcycle escorts.[67] As days passed and Qaddafi failed

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[65] Andrew Wilson, "Mystery grows over Qadhafi," Observer, 16 July 1972.

[66] Elias Nawas, "Cabinet list indicates that Colonel Gaddafi has prevailed in Libya power struggle," Times (London), 17 July 1972; see also "Tripoli: de graves divergence opposeraient le Colonel Kadhafi au Counseil de la révolution," Le Monde, 17 July 1972.

[67] James Goldsborough, "Qadhafi vs. his Libyan colleagues," International Herald Tribune, 9 October 1971.

to appear in public, whispers of his assassination abounded.[68] Qaddafi deliberately fed the confusion by keeping out of sight until early October, when he suddenly announced he had withdrawn his resignation.[69] (Nonetheless, on several occasions thereafter he again tendered his resignation, although after 1980 the Colonel made these resignations conditional so as not to supply a pretext for his removal).[70] In each instance Qaddafi laced his resignation with self-disparaging remarks which invited sycophantic correction, strongly suggesting that these half-hearted resignations were calculated to test the loyalty of Qaddafi's subordinates and allow him to reassert his authority.

In 1973 Qaddafi reorganized Libyan political life into a system of popular congresses and committees, ostensibly to remedy the putative shortcomings of representative democracy. In reality the new organs worked hand in glove with the internal security services to ferret out the government's opponents. A 'cultural revolution' launched the same year began with sweeping arrests of Marxists, Baathists, and Islamists.[71]

The broad outlines of what would henceforth be the

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[68] "Le colonel Kadhafi: n'a pas paru en public depuis le 18 septembre," Le Monde, 28 September 1971.

[69] "Qadhafi says he resigned top job, then decided to stay," International Herald Tribune, 8 October 1971.

[70] Harris, 17.

[71] The New York Times suggested that as many as 1000 people were arrested. Henry Tanner, "Tough Libyan 'Cultural revolution' stresses merger with Egypt," New York Times, 22 May 1973.

internal dimension of Libyan national security policy had thus already taken shape four years after power was wrested away from King Idris. Through the auspices of the RCC which he dominated, Qaddafi sought to dissolve all units--tribal and political--with sufficient cohesion to defy his authority. In addition, Qaddafi worked feverishly to establish his own legitimacy by emphasizing his Bedouin roots and his piety. But in his own mind the ultimate source of his legitimacy was not the will of the people but his neo-Nasserist vision. Thus we must turn to the external dimension of Libya's new national security policy to appreciate the full impact of Qaddafi's world view on the state's behavior.

Reorientation

As a junior army officer, Qaddafi possessed scant experience of international affairs to guide him in reshaping Libya's external relations. Instead he had the strength of his convictions, foremost of which was the belief that Libya, like the entire Arab world, had been repeatedly victimized by the West--the most grievous evidence of which being the existence of the State of Israel. For Qaddafi, the existing international order was fundamentally inimical to Libyan interests; indeed, he saw the dangers posed by Israel and the industrialized world to the Arabs and newly developing states in almost Manichean terms. Consequently, he concluded that Libya could only achieve security by revamping that order,

particularly by uniting with other Arab states and conquering Israel. All that was required to accomplish this, Qaddafi believed, was to weld Libya to Egypt.

Possessed of these certitudes, the young head-of-state lost no time in translating them into policy steps, many of which took aim at the Jewish state. A rapid stream of declarations spelled out the RCC's enmity to Israel, along with a promise that the new government's foreign policy would be pegged to the Palestinian cause.[72] A Jihad Fund was established in January 1970 to channel material support to Palestinian guerrillas. The Foreign Ministry set about countering Israel's diplomatic gains in sub-Saharan Africa and met with remarkable success; by 1973 some 26 African states had broken relations with Israel (although Tripoli's bargaining was but one of several factors behind Israel's diplomatic troubles in Africa).

Scarcely 24 hours after seizing power the RCC invited President Nasser to send an emissary to meet its leader. Both parties agreed the Egyptian president's confidant, Mohammed Heikal, would serve the purpose, and Heikal arrived with a small team on September 3. They were the first foreign officials to learn Qaddafi's identity and to discover the earnestness and even naivete in the RCC's Nasserism; Heikal reported to Nasser that Qaddafi was 'scandalously pure.' In a briefing that lasted until 4:00 AM, Captain Mustafa El Kharoubi

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[72] Middle East Journal 1970, 218.

explained that the main goal of the Libyan 'revolution' was unity with Egypt.[73] The following day Qaddafi met the Egyptian delegation, confidently announced that the Western forces in Libya did not pose a 'serious problem' to his forces and demanded immediate unification with Egypt.[74]

To fully appreciate the enormous significance of Qaddafi's overture to Nasser one must first consider the national security policy of the *ancien régime*. Its alignment was unabashedly pro-Western: America and Great Britain were Libya's patrons and the ultimate guarantors of its security; the principal external threat stemmed from Egypt. This arrangement was codified in a twenty year renewable treaty of friendship with Britain signed on July 29, 1953, by which Britain undertook to defend Libya from external aggression. London also agreed to train and equip the Libyan army and create a navy. In tandem to this formal agreement was an unspoken understanding that Britain would aid the King in suppressing internal dissidence. In July 1958, when the Iraqi monarch was overthrown, Britain reaffirmed its gentleman's agreement with King Idris by flying reinforcements to Cyrenaica.[75] In return Libya granted Britain over flight privileges, use of El Adem airbase,

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[73] El Saadany, 8.

[74] El Saadany, 9-10.

[75] Wright, 88.

and the right to station troops in the country.[76]

Libya entered into a similar renewable treaty with the United States on September 9, 1954, which gave the United States use of Wheelus Field until 1970. In 1957 a U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) began training Libyan army personnel.[77] In 1960 the Libyan government informally requested help in launching an air force; a formal request followed in 1962. The United States supplied instructors and two T-33 jet trainers the following year. In 1964 it was estimated that a quarter of all Libyan officers had trained in the U.S., and more had trained in Britain.[78] Thereafter, the MAAG program furnished the Libyan Air Force with four more T-33s, six C-47s, and two helicopters.

At the time this treaty was signed, diplomats did not fully anticipate the regional repercussions of Nasserism, as revealed by the comments of Henry Villard, the first U.S. Chief of Mission to Libya:

> The engineers who built Wheelus Field have not built their house out of sand . . . For its part, Libya has in effect acquired a powerful new protector in addition to its British ally. As a stakeholder in Libya's future, the United States, it stands to reason, will have a natural interest in the defense of that none too strongly unified country. What that means to a young nation, in no position to defend itself should a third world war break out, is

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[76] "Libya: The military treaties with the U.K and the U.S.A.," Africa Institute Bulletin, July 1964, 205.

[77] "U.S. helping to train army and air force," New York Herald Tribune, 4 March 1964.

[78] ibid.

clear enough.[79]

The foundations of the Wheelus Field arrangement turned out to be shakier than Mr. Villard believed. Despite its Western alignment, the monarchy was slowly forced to adopt a security policy attuned to the budding nationalist sentiments of the populace.[80] For example, French troops which had been permitted to remain in the Fezzan for the first few years of Libya's existence were told to leave by the end of 1956; subsequently, Libya permitted arms shipments to traverse the Fezzan en route to Algerian nationalists. Support for the foreign basing arrangement also waned. The transfer of the U.S. 17th Air Force headquarters from Morocco to Libya met considerable opposition in the Libyan parliament.[81] The bases had become a sore spot for several reasons. Most Libyans believed the British had flown sorties from Libya against Egypt during the 1956 Suez War. Moreover, the affluence of the military communities, in contrast to Libya's abject poverty, made them a locus of political disgruntlement.[82]

Far-sighted British observers, noting how the Arab nationalist rumblings about the bases rattled the self-confidence of the Sanusi regime, saw the writing on the

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[79] Henry Villard, Libya: The new Arab kingdom of North Africa (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 142.

[80] E.A.V. DeCandole, 132-135.

[81] Wright, 83, 85-86.

[82] "Libya: The military treaties with the U.K. and the U.S.A.," Africa Institute Bulletin (July 1964): 206.

wall. In a prescient article published in 1959, one officer argued that the limited strategic value of Britain's Libyan facilities did not justify their expense. He foresaw that in a crisis domestic sentiment would make the shaky Sanusi regime an unreliable ally, proscribing Britain's freedom of action as in 1956. The Libyan population, though not hostile, was:

> . . . by no means as friendly as many would have us believe . . . (consequently) the troops required to guard our installations in Libya would outnumber those available for offensive operations, which after all is the main purpose of having a foreign base.[83]

Furthermore, he astutely noted: 'the fact that there may be a secret "Young Officer's Society" of the type common in Middle Eastern armies, in the Libyan army, cannot be completely ruled out.'[84]

The Egyptian president also sensed that the monarchy was vulnerable to public opinion. Nasser denounced the foreign presence in Libya on February 22, 1964.[85] The next day Libya requested an early abrogation of the treaties. Consequently, Great Britain and the United States began to cast around for alternative facilities. The British began lengthening the runways at Luqa, Malta, to accommodate the long-range transport aircraft that had

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[83] Major E. O'Ballance, "Libya as a base," Army quarterly (1959): 69.

[84] O'Ballance, 68.

[85] Nasser said of the foreign bases: (they) 'constitute a threat to us and all the Arabs' ("Libyan cross-currents," Times (London), 23 March 1964). Ironically, this was the very charge that Qaddafi would hurl back at Egypt scarcely a decade later.

been dependent on the Libyan bases.[86] Losing Wheelus would cause training headaches so the Americans stalled for time, but they were aware that pressure to leave could mount again at any time.[87] The Six Day War made the internal vulnerability of the Sanusi government stand out in sharp relief. Mobs ransacked the U.S. Information Service library in Benghazi. The request for withdrawal from Wheelus was renewed. The United States began serious study of alternatives to its arrangements with Libya. Likewise, heads in Britain concluded there was 'no pressing military reason' to retain a Libyan presence.[88] Thus, throughout 1968 Britain quietly withdrew units from Libya.[89]

With the departure of the British and the Americans only a matter of time, the monarchy was obliged to assume responsibility for its own defense. Egypt--ambitious and oil-hungry--was regarded as the main foreign threat.[90] Distrust of Cairo had been heightened when an Egyptian police captain directed the sabotage of an oil

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[86] "Malta Alternative," Times (London), 24 August 1964.

[87] Weldon Wallace, "U.S. air base hopes to stay," Baltimore Sun, 6 June 1965.

[88] George Ashworth, "U.S. hunts Wheelus replacement." Christian Science Monitor, 19 June 1967; cf. "Backlash of Mideast war: Libya turns on the U.S.," U.S. News and World Report (21 August 1967): 48.

[89] For details see Africa Report (1 April 1968).

[90] "Libya: The Military treaties with the U.K. and the U.S.A.," Africa Institute Bulletin (July 1964): 206.

installation in Marsa al-Brega on July 22, 1965.[91] The monarchy therefore turned to Britain for help in upgrading its defenses. In 1967 Libya placed a contract worth over £130 million with the British Aircraft Corporation for an air defense (AD) system including radar, Rapier short-range surface-to-air missiles, and high-altitude Thunderbird missiles. The Libyan government made no secret of the fact that its AD system was purchased with the Egyptian Air Force in mind.[92] The next year an order followed for 200 Chieftain tanks, a sale which was defended in the British Parliament on the grounds that Libya needed the tanks for defence against Egypt (and were not intended for use against Israel).[93] The Libyan air force negotiated the purchase of twenty American F-5s, while the navy paid England another eleven million pounds for a frigate, a corvette, three patrol boats and a depot ship.[94]

These purchases were later lampooned by one writer for having 'less to do with war than with business.'[95] This was not an entirely fair criticism. Certainly corruption was rife--officials under the monarchy were

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[91] Africa Report (March 1966); see also The New York Times, 20 January 1966.

[92] "New Middle East deal in view," Flight International, 28 September 1967.

[93] "British tanks for Libya?," Times, 8 December 1969.

[94] David Fairhall, "The Libyan void," Guardian, 31 October 1969.

[95] First, 95.

renowned for their venality.[96] Nevertheless, without a Western presence the kingdom did in fact stand vulnerable to Egyptian intervention. The army did not possess a single tank, nor were its soldiers proficient in even rudimentary military skills. The largest functional units were companies. In fact, a year after the RCC seized power the Egyptian military training mission had to work frantically simply to ensure that the army could parade properly.[97] Under the circumstances the monarchy had little choice but to invest the requisite sums to strengthen its hitherto neglected forces. For the interim, however, the King still looked to London and Washington to provide for his defence. This pro-Western orientation met its demise with the Sanusi throne in September 1969.

His imagination fired by Nasser's eloquence, Qaddafi told Heikal to inform the Egyptian President that 'we made this revolution for him.' But in a telling afterthought, Qaddafi presumed to give the Egyptian leader a lesson in strategy:

> (Nasser) . . . is forgetting depth. Libya represents depth. We have hundreds of miles of Mediterranean coastline; we have the airfields; we have the money; we have everything! Tell President Nasser we made this revolution for him. He can take everything of ours and add it to the rest of the Arab world's resources to be used for the battle.[98]

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[96] A point Qaddafi often made. Ansell and Al-Arif, 83; Parker, 66.

[97] El Saadany, 51-52.

[98] Heikal, 70.

Qaddafi's enthusiasm outstripped his strategic awareness. The young Libyan was wrong; Nasser had not forgotten depth. Cairo's strategic alliance with Khartoum had the express aim of providing strategic depth. Furthermore, Nasser had occasionally sheltered Egyptian warplanes in Algeria where they were safely beyond the reach of the Israeli air force. Nasser was nevertheless elated by the prospect of further enlarging Egypt's strategic hinterland, and responded to this windfall by rushing army and naval units to fend off any foreign attempts to reinstate the deposed monarchy.[99]

On September 5, 1969, the RCC requested that Cairo dispatch a contingent of military advisers to bolster the Libyan armed forces.[100] The Egyptian military attaché set up shop in the Libyan Ministry of Defence compound and began the task of redesigning the Libyan armed forces. Within three months at least 500 'technical and military advisers' were placed at the RCC's disposal.[101] This number soon rose to an estimated 2000 Egyptian soldiers.[102] These advisers supervised a general restructuring of the Libyan army. Soon plans were underway to turn the facilities at Wheelus Air Base into

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[99] ibid., 71-72.

[100] El Saadany, 12.

[101] David Leitch, "Debré sells Libya French know-how," Sunday Times, 25 January 1970.

[102] Alan MacDougall, "Libya," in Fighting armies: Antagonists in the Middle East, ed. Richard Gabriel, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 140.

a joint Libyan-Egyptian air academy, and to harbor Egyptian MiG-21 interceptors and Su-7 fighters there.[103] The Libyan military academy was abolished, and in the interim Libyan cadets studied at Egyptian academies. Fathi Deeb, a senior Egyptian official, was reportedly entrusted with organizing the new Libyan intelligence service.[104] Libyan military assets were routinely spoken of as a supplement to Egyptian strength in preparation for further combat with Israel. When Qaddafi and Nasser met for the first time in December 1969 the Libyan pressed for immediate military unification and the two leaders reviewed proposals for a joint war council.[105]

The influx of Egyptian aid gave the Soviet bloc another opportunity to cultivate Tripoli. In April 1970 the Soviets tried, through Cairo's auspices, to obtain access for its fleet to the harbor facilities at Tobruk. In addition, the USSR hoped to station reconnaissance aircraft at the El Adem airbase which the British had recently abandoned.[106] Qaddafi remained suspicious of the Soviets' advances and critical of Egypt's dependency upon communist advisers. However, Russian technicians were reportedly included in the Egyptian contingent that

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[103] Edward Kolcum, "Arab pilots to train at Wheelus," Aviation week & space technology, 23 March 1970, 14.

[104] "Libya: Phantom government," An-Nahar Arab Report, 14 September 1970, 2.

[105] El Saadany, 28-29.

[106] Clare Hollingworth, "Russia seeks facilities in Libya," Daily Telegraph, 21 April 1970.

occupied El Adem, and may have served elsewhere in Libya even at this early date.[107]

Beneath this enamorment with Cairo lay the driving force of Qaddafi's world view. Qaddafi was dazed to find himself standing shoulder to shoulder with Gamal Abdel Nasser, an act which he believed gave him a domestic legitimacy far greater than that bequeathed by any referendum. He was particularly gratified when Nasser designated him 'the trustee of Arab nationalism' during a rally in Benghazi. Shortly after Nasser's death Libya was swamped with posters showing the Egyptian leader, now an angel, passing the deed of Arab nationalism to Qaddafi.[108]

Paradoxically, Nasser's death probably came as a relief to both men. Restraining Qaddafi's zeal wearied the ailing Egyptian President.[109] Yet he was repeatedly forced to disabuse Qaddafi of 'the extremely simplistic way in which he looked at the problems of war and peace.'[110] For his part, Qaddafi was ill at ease with his mentor's readiness to supplant pan-Arabist ideals with political pragmatism, as when Nasser agreed to a 90 day cease-fire arranged by the United States during the

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[107] Colvin, "Russians move in," Daily Telegraph, 29 April 1970.

[108] El Saadany, 50, 54.

[109] Anwar El Sadat, In search of identity: An autobiography (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 202.

[110] Heikal 1975, 76.

War of Attrition.[111] Qaddafi's discomfort betrayed a fundamental asynchrony in their outlooks. Qaddafi's brand of Nasserism--fiery, rebellious, confrontational--was one that Nasser himself had begun to outgrow. Unlike Qaddafi, Nasser had come face to face with the disastrous consequences such an ideology could produce, and painful experience had tempered his judgement.[112] It is therefore reasonable to conclude that had Nasser survived, Qaddafi's ambitions would have inevitably impinged upon his deference to the Egyptian President. Indeed, one can speculate that by 1973 Qaddafi had grown to see Nasser less as a mentor to be emulated than as a forerunner to be surpassed; Qaddafi would be Jesus to Nasser's John the Baptist. At the very least, Qaddafi saw Nasser--even in death--as a rival. In point of fact, in 1973 Qaddafi forbade the display of statues and posters of Nasser on the grounds that they were inappropriate for an egalitarian state--a consideration which did not prevent his own image from becoming *de rigueur*.[113]

The second facet of Libya's security orientation was eliminating the presence of Western forces inside its borders. Reneging on the RCC pledge not to abrogate any

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[111] El Saadany, 50-51.

[112] For an elegant comparison of Qaddafi's Nasserism to Nasser's, see Fouad Adjami, The Arab Predicament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 93.

[113] "Libyan, in anti-atheist move bars portraits of leaders," New York Times, 18 February 1973.

extant treaties, on October 16, 1969, Qaddafi called upon Great Britain and the United States to evacuate their Libyan bases. He even warned that force would be used to reclaim the bases if necessary.[114]

This was a risky step for Qaddafi, insomuch as it represented his government's first direct challenge to the interests of two major foreign powers. Since such challenges would come to characterize the counterproductive nature of Libyan state behavior, it is important to understand why Qaddafi was able to make this demand with impunity.

Firstly, Qaddafi's victory was made hollow by the fact that neither the British nor the Americans were much perturbed. As we have seen, both powers had long ago concluded that their Libyan bases were of negligible strategic import. Though Libya retained some significance as a supplier of oil, the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles deprived it of its former strategic import as a staging ground for U.S. bombers. In any event, the leases on the bases were already set to expire in 1970 and 1973.

Second, Qaddafi was also the beneficiary of a long series of fruitless Western interventions in the Third World, not least the on-going war in Vietnam. Rather than swim against the tide of Arab nationalism, the U.S. State Department hoped conciliatory gestures would

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[114] "Libya asks U.S. to leave air base now," International Herald Tribune, 22 October 1969.

channel that nationalism against a Soviet bid for influence (ironically, the Soviets were equally optimistic about co-opting the new 'anti-imperialist' regime).[115] Moreover, the Americans had always assumed that the British would intervene should their Libyan interests be threatened.[116] But in the event, London settled upon appeasement for much the same reason Washington did. The acting ambassador, Peter Wakefield, ascribed the Foreign Office's lack of action to the still all too vivid memories of Suez.[117]

In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger recalls being frustrated by such timidity:

> A study was prepared of economic and political pressure points on Libya; but the agencies did not have their heart in it. All options involving action were rejected, causing me to exclaim that I was averse to submitting to the President a paper that left us with the proposition that we could do nothing. My reluctance did not change a consensus along precisely those lines. According to the dominant view, the real danger of radicalization resided in our *opposition* to Qaddafi.[118]

The dominant view prevailed, and Washington resolved to befriend the new regime. Thus the Americans departed Wheelus Air Force Base on June 11, 1970--almost three

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[115] Pravda, 16 November 1969.

[116] A belief spelled out in declassified National Security Council memoranda from 1960 and 1967 (Blundy and Lycett, 51-52).

[117] Blundy and Lycett, 60.

[118] Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1982), emphasis in the original, 860.

weeks ahead of schedule.[119]

The third facet of Libya's reorientation was the expansion and modernization of the military. On September 10, 1969, Qaddafi told the Egyptian news agency:

> My work in the coming stage will focus on reorganizing the three branches of the armed forces--army, air force, and navy. I will work in accordance with the instructions of the Revolutionary Command Council to equip the Libyan Army with the most modern weapons in the light of the most modern military tactics in the world--from East or West.[120]

On October 14 he reiterated his intention 'to apply the most modern military systems.'[121] Qaddafi complained that under the Sanusi regime enlisted men functioned as domestic servants instead of as professional soldiers. Officers were 'far removed from military spirit' and were closer to merchants; it was not unheard of for officers to moonlight at different jobs during normal working hours.[122] Qaddafi aimed to rectify this situation and create 'a modern military force on a basis of co-ordination and integration with Arab military forces.'[123] Such integration, he believed, was essential if the Arabs were to defeat Israel.

Libya's military modernization began with a review

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[119] "U.S. Evacuates Libyan base as demanded by new regime," International Herald Tribune, 12 June 1970.

[120] Middle East Journal 1970, 219.

[121] ibid.

[122] Ansell and Al-Arif, 81-82.

[123] ibid.

of outstanding arms orders. As previously noted, King Idris had already set in motion efforts to re-equip the armed forces in preparation for the Anglo-American departure. Just two weeks before the September coup the monarchy announced a significant budget increase for modernizing the armed forces, and during the preceding two years the King had spent at least £120 million and perhaps as much as £190 million on modernization.[124] Yet the RCC's modernization campaign was more a reversal than an extension of this trend. Qaddafi's agenda aimed at giving Libya a capacity for offensive operations rather than a sound national defence force (how else to destroy the 'Zionist entity'?).[125] This preference became increasingly explicit over time. For example, in 1973 Qaddafi derided the SAMs offered by the Soviet Union: 'What advantage do we get from these missiles? To defend ourselves only, while we are in need of an offensive armament.'[126]

Yet Libya's commander-in-chief was ill-prepared for the task of designing a military force with balanced, sustainable offensive capabilities. His previous commands had been insignificant and his military education lacking: the tiny Libyan military academy had barely been established when he studied there, and his

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[124] "Libyan army budget," Financial Times, 19 August 1969.

[125] Wright, 201.

[126] Mu'ammar El Qathafi, Discourses by Mu'ammar el-Qathafi Chairman of R.C.C. published in the Arab and international press (n.p.: Adam Publishers, 1975), 28-29.

only other significant training was a signals course in England. He had never attended a Command and Staff College or its equivalent and was untrained in the operational art. This lack of advanced military education revealed itself when El Saadany sought Qaddafi's views on restructuring the Libyan army. Qaddafi would not elucidate his strategic vision, leading the attaché to suspect that the Libyan leader was unsure of how to proceed.[127]

Consequently, arms procurement was haphazard and imbalanced from the perspective of combined arms. Unable to resolve problems of standardization, the regime opted to equip some units with Western arms and others with Soviet equipment. The only constant which guided Qaddafi's impetuous procurement policies was a penchant for firepower and state of the art technology. An early casualty of this approach was the air defence contract awarded to the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) by the monarchy. The deal stuck in the craw of the RCC for several reasons. First, Qaddafi accused officials in the previous government of ordering an overpriced system in exchange for hefty bribes: 'Those who tried to corrupt the armed forces must be brought to account. Those who traded in the name of the armed forces must be punished.'[128] Second, the RCC objected to the system's envisaged deployment along the Tunisian and

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[127] El Saadany, 22.

[128] Middle East Journal 1970, 204.

Egyptian borders rather than along the Mediterranean coastline. To Qaddafi and his followers the thought of deploying an air defence system against their Arab neighbors was nothing less than scandalous, a reaction that epitomized the distinction between the current and former governments' security orientations.[129] In contrast to King Idris, the young Nasserites reserved their apprehensions for the U.S. Sixth Fleet and the Soviet Eskadra operating along the extensive shoreline which Libya's new air defenses would not cover.[130] Finally, Qaddafi suspected the British saw the BAC deal as a means of retaining influence in Libya by sending large numbers of technicians to operate and maintain the system. After weighing these considerations, the RCC announced it would not honor the BAC contract.

The Libyans did, however, wish to complete the purchase of Chieftain main battle tanks, and Whitehall tentatively attempted to use both the BAC and Chieftain contracts as leverage to salvage some form of basing and overflight rights.[131] Then still-Defence Minister El Hawaz retorted that the RCC would buy its tanks from the Soviet Union if Britain cancelled the Chieftain order.[132]

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[129] Economist, 15 November 1969; Frederick Muscat, My president, my son (Malta: Adam Publishers, 1974), 91.

[130] Muscat, 91.

[131] David Fairhall, "The Libyan void," Guardian, 31 October 1969.

[132] "Libya threatens to buy Soviet tanks," Financial Times, 11 November 1969.

Apparently believing that Tripoli was bluffing, London doggedly attempted to salvage the BAC contract by linking it to the Chieftain sale.[133] Deliveries of the Chieftains due to begin in December 1969 were indefinitely delayed.[134] The *Guardian* editorialized: 'Libya should therefore agree to accept the air defence system in return for continued delivery of Chieftain tanks.'[135]

As it turned out, Tripoli was not bluffing and delivered on its threat to buy Soviet tanks. Shipments of T-54 and T-55 tanks, light armored vehicles and amphibious vehicles commenced in July 1970.[136] A few months later, Qaddafi's second-in-command, Abdul Salam Jalloud, demanded a refund of Libya's £41 million downpayment on the BAC and Chieftain orders (and brashly demanded another £16 million for good measure). It was nevertheless clear that the Libyans still wanted to buy British tanks, albeit with no strings attached. Jalloud rejected out of hand a British proposal to replace the Chieftains with older Centurion tanks, and also balked at the precondition of pledging not to use the tanks against Israel. To the contrary, he asserted that Libya would

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[133] However, the Economist advised against such linkage. See "Solomon might know what to do," Economist, 15 November 1969.

[134] "British tanks for Libya?," Times, 8 December 1969.

[135] Terence Prittie, "Complex talks with Libya," Guardian, 9 December 1969.

[136] Ian McDonald, "Libya gets tanks from Russia," Times, 23 July 1970.

'naturally' use the tanks to 'recover lost Arab lands.'[137]

If London underestimated Tripoli's resolve to cancel the BAC deal, Tripoli likewise failed to appreciate that the Chieftain sale would not proceed in such an atmosphere no matter what Jalloud's negotiating tactics. Once the downpayments were refunded, Jalloud promised, Libya would purchase British radars and armored cars. Should a refund not be forthcoming, he hinted at repercussions on British oil interests in Libya.[138] Neither carrot nor stick worked, and Whitehall pronounced the Chieftain order dead a few weeks later.[139]

The Libyan army continued its drive towards mechanization by negotiating the purchase of hundreds of Land Rovers and Bedford Lorries in February 1971.[140] However, the regime explicitly pegged improved relations with Britain on the Chieftains issue. Tripoli still balked at restrictions on Libya's use of its weaponry; Israel, Jalloud claimed, hoped to expand into Libya or the Sudan within six or seven years.[141] The British were

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[137] "Libyans offer Britain big arms orders if bar on Chieftain tank is lifted," Times, 4 November 1970.

[138] Campbell Page, "Britain's interests 'at risk' as Libya presents arms bill," Guardian, 3 November 1970.

[139] "British balk at sending Libya tanks," International Herald Tribune, 24 November 1970.

[140] "Army vehicles sale to Libya is planned," Guardian, 23 February 1971.

[141] Richard Johns, "Libya to insist on supply of Chieftain tanks," Financial Times, 26 April 1971.

not swayed by this supposition, and Tripoli turned to yet another supplier. In August 1972 Libya began purchasing used M-113 (U.S.-designed) armored personnel carriers, including amphibious models, from Italy.[142] The irony of purchasing arms from Libya's former colonial power was apparently lost upon the RCC.

In parallel to this modernization of its ground forces Tripoli undertook a drastic expansion of its air power. In this the Libyans were aided by the French, who were anxious to fill the gap left by the Americans and British. Scarcely a month after the September coup the French ambassador brooked the subject of supplying the new regime with Mirage fighters more sophisticated than those in any Arab arsenal at the time.[143] (Moreover, these were planes which had originally been destined for Israel in a sale which Paris ultimately cancelled.) The two parties settled on a deal for 100 warplanes: 50 Mirage V fighter-bombers, 30 Mirage III-B interceptors, and 20 Mirages for training and reconnaissance. The 60 million pound deal was the largest arms sale in French history, and included provisions for 1000 French technicians to train the Libyan Air Force.[144]

The sale drew considerable international criticism

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[142] "Italy is said to be selling tanks to Libya," International Herald Tribune, 22 August 1972.

[143] El Saadany, 25.

[144] John Hess, "France now says Libyans will get total of 100 jets," New York Times, 22 January 1970; David Leitch, "Debré sells Libya French know-how," Sunday Times, 25 January 1970.

for potentially upsetting the Arab-Israeli balance of power. The French Prime Minister therefore tried to cast the contract in purely defensive terms:

> These machines are required by the Libyan Government to give Libya a defense system guaranteeing its security. I would point out that Libya is a country--from the point of view of territory, one and a half times the size of France--with a very small population, less than 2,000,000 inhabitants; that this country possesses fabulous oil wealth which could make it, if not the first, one of the leading producers in the wold; and that this situation could well excite covetousness in the future. . . . the Libyan Government believes that it is necessary to assure itself of means of defence. As it can not base its defenses on big battalions, it seems to it that it must have an adequate air force flown by Libyan pilots.[145]

Tel Aviv was justifiably skeptical of the unenforceable terms of sale which forbade Libya from transferring the planes to Egypt for use against Israel. The entire Libyan air force (all 400 men and 60 officers) had only 10 qualified fighter pilots--not even enough to provide alternate crews for each of its seven remaining F-5s.[146] Moreover, the air force lacked ground crews capable of maintaining so many planes.[147]

It was not long before Israel's fears were realized. Well before Libya took possession of its first Mirage, the Libyan pilots had washed out of the French training

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[145] Keesing's, 23809A.

[146] Only a year earlier the Libyan air force had ordered twenty F-5s from the United States. Of the ten planes that had been delivered by the time of the Mirage order, three had already crashed.

[147] James Goldsborough, "Libya: Planes where there are no pilots?," International Herald Tribune, 11 January 1970; cf. "Too many excuses," Economist, 17 January 1970, 29.

program and were replaced by Egyptians in Libyan uniforms.[148] Libya had consulted with Egypt from the outset of the sale and pledged to loan the planes for the 'war effort'; furthermore, the French negotiators privately--but explicitly--assured the Libyans they could employ the aircraft against Israel, and the proviso against transferring Mirages to Egypt only applied to 'permanent transfer' (i.e., for more than five months at a time).[149] In February 1971 Qaddafi publicly stated that Libya was free to use the planes as it saw fit.[150]

Although Paris was eager to equip Libya's ground forces as well, Qaddafi was more interested in expanding the air deal. During a state visit in November 1973, Qaddafi asked President Pompidou to replace the outstanding Mirage-III jets on order with the more advanced Mirage F-1 interceptor.[151] Libya tried to buy an additional thirty F-1s the following year.[152]

In need of an AD system to protect its Mirage jets, the regime looked for an alternative to the cancelled BAC deal. On April 7, 1970, a delegation travelled to Moscow seeking 'state of the art' interceptors. For its SAM

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[148] "Libyan pilots trained in France 'were Egyptian,'" Times, 17 February 1971.

[149] El Saadany 1994, 27.

[150] "Libyan pilots trained in France 'were Egyptian,'" Times, 17 February 1971.

[151] Francis Hope, "Qadhafi shops for Mirages," Observer, 25 November 1973.

[152] "Talks on buying 30 new Mirages," Middle East Economic Digest, 18 October 1974.

batteries Tripoli successfully placed an £8 million order for Tigercat SAMs with London. However, the British were incensed when in July 1971 Qaddafi's unarmed executive jet forced down a BOAC plane en route to the Sudan, where an anti-Numeiri coup had just taken place. The coup leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Babiker el-Nur and Major Farouk Mandullah, were travelling with Whitehall's blessing. When their capture was announced the putsch crumbled. Qaddafi handed the pair over to Numeiri, and they were promptly executed.[153] Notably, Qaddafi's gambit brought few dividends either in Sudan (where relations with Numeiri soon faltered) or in England, where Whitehall retaliated by cancelling the Tigercat contract.

To summarize, Qaddafi's government dramatically redefined the meaning of Libyan security in terms that set the state at odds with Israel and the West. That it was the RCC's prerogative to so conceptualize and pursue Libya's national interests is indisputable; whether its new policy would further those interests remained to be seen.

Confrontation and Extremism

The interaction between the RCC's internal and external national security policies was volatile. Qaddafi's lack of accountability combined with his world

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[153] "Libya row may lose £8M contract," Guardian, 31 July 1971.

view to sweep his state into a vortex of increasingly aggressive behavior. This aggressiveness was epitomized by Libya's occupation of the Aouzou Strip in May 1973 and the proclamation of sovereignty over the Gulf of Sirte in the same year.[154] Qaddafi justified his claims in the Mediterranean by invoking Libya's need for security: 'Because of the Gulf's geographical location commanding a view of the Southern (sic) part of the country, it is, therefore, crucial to the security of the Libyan Arab Republic.'[155] Moreover, 'everything concerning the security of the Mediterranean . . . must be of great interest to all Arab countries.'[156] How then were the Arabs to find security in the Mediterranean?

> I believe the best way of achieving this aim would be that the littoral Mediterranean countries should acknowledge that their interests and their security are threatened by the presence of the Great Powers in this sea. Only then would they put any real effort into neutralisation . . .[157]

Diplomacy was but one key to Qaddafi's Mediterranean aspirations. Scarcely a month after seizing power Qaddafi called for a surge in Arab seapower:

> The tendency in the Arab homeland, and not only in Libya, and more particularly in countries lying along the Mediterranean shores, should be towards the navy in the first place, followed,

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[154] Libya's relations with Chad are examined in Chapter Five.

[155] Dennis R. Neutze, "The Gulf of Sidra incident: A legal perspective," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings 108 (January 1982), 28.

[156] Mirella Bianco, Gadafi: Voice from the desert (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1975), 156.

[157] Bianco, 157.

in the second place, by the air force.[158]

On October 11, 1973, Libya declared sovereignty over the Gulf of Sirte to latitude 32 degrees and 30 minutes, an invisible line running from Misurata to Benghazi--the infamous 'line of death.' The timing of the declaration was significant. To the east the Yom Kippur War raged and Egypt had already declared Israel's coastal waters a war zone to intimidate merchant shipping. In this context, the Libyan declaration was guaranteed Arab approval, although the linkage between the Gulf of Sirte and the Arab war effort was questionable at best.

Qaddafi clearly intended to deny the Gulf to foreign navies, notably the U.S. Sixth Fleet. Furthermore, by declaring the Gulf of Sirte to be internal Libyan waters, he in effect tried to deny an even greater section of the Mediterranean to foreign navies. With the 32.5 parallel as their baseline, Libya's territorial waters would extend northward for an additional twelve miles. Within this area foreign ships would still enjoy freedom of passage but not the right to conduct military exercises.[159]

Qaddafi believed the Gulf was vital because it dipped 'inside the guts of Libya.'[160] However, the Libyan claim contravened the 1958 Geneva Convention on

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[158] Ansell and Al Arif, 82.

[159] Neutze, 29.

[160] SWB ME/0481/A/8, 13 June 1989.

the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone.[161] According to Article 7, a bay must have a mouth of less than 24 miles (in contrast, the mouth of the Gulf of Sirte as delineated by Qaddafi extends for some 300 miles). Libya's only legal recourse was to take refuge in a loophole recognizing historic bays. Thus, Tripoli asserted: 'Through history and without any dispute, the Libyan Arab Republic has exercised its sovereignty over the Gulf.'[162]

This was not the first time Qaddafi displayed hegemonic ambitions in the Mediterranean. In fact, by one account the LAF had already endangered innocent shipping by mining portions of the Gulf, an act which may have caused the sinking of two ships, one Greek and one Lebanese.[163] In June 1972 Libya restricted the airspace within a 100 mile radius of Tripoli in defiance of the conventional 12 mile zone.[164] On March 21, 1973, two Libyan Mirage fighters fired on a U.S. C-130 flying a reconnaissance mission eighty miles from the Libyan coast. Although the C-130 escaped unharmed, firing on an

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[161] See paragraphs four and seven of Article Seven of the "Convention on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone," Geneva, 29 April 1958, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Treaty Series No. 3, 1965), Command 2511.

[162] Neutze, 28.

[163] William Gutteridge, "Libya: Still a threat to Western interests?," Conflict Studies no. 160 (London: Institute for the study of conflict, 1984), 17.

[164] Hossein Alikhani, In the claw of the eagle: A guide to U.S. sanctions against Libya (London: Centre for Business Studies, 1995), 9.

unarmed aircraft in international airspace was an extraordinary provocation--and a profoundly risky one since the aircraft in question belonged to a superpower. The United States quietly manifested its determination to preserve free access to international waters and airspace. On April 30, 1973, three Libyan Mirages were intercepted by fourteen carrier-based F-4 Phantoms flying 40 miles off the Libyan coast north of Tripoli.[165] The American jets played cat-and-mouse with the Libyan pilots. In response to this quiet show of strength, Qaddafi dramatically placed Libya on 'war alert.'[166]

Appropriation of the Gulf of Sirte was a logical extension of this pattern, based on Qaddafi's overarching desire to upset the existing international order. After laying claim to the Gulf in September 1973, Libya seized five Italian fishing trawlers operating in 'Libyan waters.' To reinforce its point, Libyan air force jets attacked an Italian navy corvette 33 miles off the Libyan coast on September 21.[167] Two Italian sailors were injured by machine gun fire. The despised Italians were popular targets for the RCC: on October 7, 1970, all Italian assets in Libya were nationalized and Italian expatriates were ordered to leave the country.

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[165] Anthony McDermott, "The Colonel and the Koran," Guardian, 19 May 1973.

[166] Jim Hoagland, "Qadhafi says U.S. incursion triggered Libyan war alert," International Herald Tribune, 17 May 1973.

[167] "Libyan jets attack Italian navy ship," International Herald Tribune, 22-23 September 1973.

Remarkably, the Italians, too, accepted these affronts with little protest.

Inevitably, Qaddafi's Mediterranean aspirations brought him into conflict with the dominant Cold War powers. Tripoli's maritime claim was formally protested by both the Soviet Union and the United States. Nevertheless, Libya continued to assert its right to the contested region and to advocate the expulsion of all foreign (i.e., Western) fleets from the Mediterranean. The logical focus of this campaign became Malta, with Cyprus next on the list.[168] Qaddafi campaigned energetically to draw the island into his sphere of influence:

> It is from this standpoint (security through banning Great Power fleets) that we have offered our help to the friendly people of Malta . . . It is none the less true that the Great Powers have tried literally to buy and sell the island in order to dominate it more effectively: that they have done everything they could to transform it into a permanent naval base for their fleets.[169]

On June 30, 1971, a three-ship squadron (consisting of the supply ship Zeltin --the largest boat in the Libyan fleet--and two patrol boats, Tobruk and Sabratha) paid its first official visit to the island. Under other circumstances Whitehall might have taken this Libyan grandstanding with a grain of salt. After all, Royal Navy personnel seconded to the Libyan Navy provided the

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[168] Libyan Arab Republic Ministry of Information and Culture, The revolution of 1st September: The fourth anniversary (Tripoli, Libya: 1973), 267.

[169] Bianco, 157.

fleet's backbone and even had to help sail the Libyan boats into the Maltese port--where the British sailors diplomatically avoided the cameras.[170]

But two months later Libya offered Malta a $12 million dollar loan. In exchange, Tripoli expected Malta to oust the British and close existing NATO facilities on the island. In December of the same year Qaddafi nationalized British Petroleum's Libyan assets. Dom Mintoff, the Maltese Prime Minister, visited Tripoli in the first week of January 1972, and days later Malta bid farewell to the British. Qaddafi ordered the Royal Navy's training mission (10 officers, 37 ratings, and some 100 dependents) to leave Libya on the same day.[171] Libyan troops in civilian clothes were rumored to be running Malta's airport following the departure of a British contingent. Even though Malta later made a seven year concession allowing Britain to retain partial use of the island, the new agreement forbade using facilities on Malta for attacks against an Arab state--a considerable victory for Qaddafi. In July 1972 Libya and Malta signed a treaty on economic and cultural development.

As it became clearer to Western military observers that Qaddafi was trying to gain control of sorts of the central Mediterranean, the consequences for Tripoli

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[170] "Libyan fleet for Malta," Sunday Telegraph, 20 June 1971.

[171] Patrick Keatley, "Formal end to Libyan treaty," Guardian, 5 January 1972; "Royal Navy men ordered to leave Libya," Times, 4 January 1972.

became more serious.[172] Britain expressed its displeasure by formally terminating its treaty of friendship with Libya rather than letting it lapse. Relations between the two states plummeted the following spring when the ship Claudia was intercepted off the Irish coast with five tons of Libyan arms for the IRA. Britain promptly suspended military sales to Libya.[173] Qaddafi was nonplussed. In his own words, he was 'making war on Great Britain' and would therefore back the IRA 'to the hilt.'[174] Although he had only a vague understanding of the Irish conflict, he still possessed the certitudes of his world view:

> Aid to Ireland enables us to kill three birds with one stone. We still support liberation movements; we are showing the whole world that the Arab revolution is passing from the defensive to the attack; we pay Great Britain back in some way, even though minimally, for the harm she has done and continues to do in our countries.[175]

Qaddafi's truculence propelled him towards other counterproductive acts. Twice international disasters were narrowly averted only because of his dependency upon Egyptian aid. In February 1973 a Libyan airliner strayed over the Sinai desert (then held by Israel) and was shot down by Israeli fighters. Mobs in Tripoli demanded

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[172] For example, see Lewis B. Ware's 1977 study "The Maltese-Libyan entente in the Mediterranean basin" (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University).

[173] "Government suspends arms supply to Libya," Times, 7 April 1973.

[174] Alikhani, 9.

[175] Tremlett, 192.

vengeance. In April Qaddafi called the commander of an Egyptian submarine berthed in Libya to his office and ordered him--verbally and in writing--to find and sink the British oceanliner Queen Elizabeth II, which was en route to Israel with mainly Jewish passengers. The Egyptian submarine commander promptly put to sea and informed Cairo of the matter. Sadat instantly countermanded Qaddafi's order and instructed the submarine to return to Egypt. This brazen attempt to embroil Egypt in a monumental act of state-sponsored terrorism gave Sadat additional reason to doubt Qaddafi's desirability as an ally.[176]

Tripoli chased its Pan-Arab rainbow with the same startling lack of political or military sophistication with which it sought to attack the Jewish state, as demonstrated during a July 1971 coup d'etat attempt in Morocco. Eager to be rid of King Hassan, Qaddafi ordered three Egyptian bombers to attack the King's palace. The Egyptian military attaché stalled for time while he contacted Cairo. Acting once again on Sadat's instructions, the pilots took off but then changed direction and returned to Egypt. Not to be easily thwarted, Qaddafi next tried (unsuccessfully) to arrange air passage to Morocco for his commando units before finally admitting defeat.[177]

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[176] Anwar El Sadat, Those I have known (New York: Continuum, 1984), 48-50.

[177] El Saadany, 72-73.

Likewise, during September 1970--the infamous 'Black September'--Qaddafi became enraged at King Hussein's expulsion of the PLO. He tried to persuade Saudi Arabia's King Feisal and Nasser to invade Jordan, offering to send a Libyan armored force to join in the battle:

> I think we should send armed forces to Amman--armed forces from Iraq and Syria. . . . What Hussein is doing is worse than the Jews . . . we must send someone to seize him, handcuff him, stop him from what he's doing, and take him off to an asylum.[178]

Neither the Egyptians nor the Saudis were swayed by Qaddafi's professed zeal, and El Saadany was forced to remind the Colonel that the LAF had barely been trained for parade and were not even remotely combat ready. He later wrote: 'It became apparent that Qaddafi was driven by emotion and enthusiasm rather than logic, a reflection of military, as well as political, immaturity.'[179]

Inevitably, the Libyan leader's growing inability to reconcile the imperatives of his world view with international norms, and Libya's limited capabilities, had self-defeating repercussions. Nowhere was this clearer than in the case of Egypt, where relations became unsteady after the death of President Nasser in September 1970. Qaddafi suspected (correctly, as it turned out) that Nasser's successor, Anwar El Sadat, did not share

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[178] Seymour Hersh, Kissinger: The price of power, (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 240; see also Mohamed Heikal, The Cairo Documents (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 83-4.

[179] El Saadany, 53.

Tripoli's revolutionary ardor. Relations between the two cooled as Sadat deflected Qaddafi's insistence upon immediately unifying their respective states.[180] It became clear to the Egyptians that Qaddafi aspired to be president of both Egypt and Libya, and he was sorely disappointed when Sadat, not he, became president of the Union of Arab Republics (embracing Libya, Egypt, and Syria).[181] As a sop to Qaddafi's ego, some Egyptian officials agreed to make the Libyan Colonel the commander-in-chief of the combined Libyan-Egyptian armies, an idea which Sadat rejected in Qaddafi's presence. During a February 1973 summit Qaddafi in turn rejected Sadat's strategy of limited war.

Consequently, Libya did not figure significantly into Sadat's plans for the 1973 war. This was a devastating slight to a man who saw himself as the champion of the Arabs. Duly offended, Qaddafi made a speech on October 7 in which he predicted the war would end in catastrophe and warned Egyptian soldiers not to believe their military command's predictions. He further protested on October 23:

> This war is not mine. Assad and Sadat took their decision and implemented their plan without my approval and without even consulting me. Neither had they informed me of anything, though our three countries are members of a

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[180] Sadat's prefered tactic was to allow Qaddafi to make a fool of himself, thereby alienating the Egyptian masses. For a vivid example, see Jehan Sadat's recollection of Qaddafi's address to an Egyptian women's conference (Jehan Sadat, A woman of Egypt [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987], 333-36).

[181] El Saadany, 68, 79.

> Federal Union whose constitution stipulates clearly that the decision of war or peace can't be taken without a consensus by the three heads of state.[182]

Exclusion from the war's pre-planning was not the only blow to Qaddafi's ego. After travelling to Cairo to offer his help in repulsing the Israeli counter-offensive, the Colonel had an acrimonious exchange with Sadat, who impressed upon the Libyan that his tactical insights were unwanted by refusing to admit him to the War Room.[183] Sadat then rubbed salt in the Colonel's wounds by welcoming a number of Saudi princes into the War Room.[184] This second snub was too much for Qaddafi to bear. He told the press:

> We also disagree about the manner of conducting the campaign. I had once submitted to them a strategic plan, but their general staffs decided otherwise. I still think that my plan is better. Even if Egypt and Syria were to defeat Israel, I cannot lend my name to a comic-opera war . . . I'm in profound disagreement with Presidents Sadat and Assad even on the aims of their war. For me, the essential thing is not to take back from Israel the territories she conquered in 1967, but to free the Palestinians, all the Palestinians, from the Zionist yoke.[185]

This was not the first time that Qaddafi's strategic counsel--which amounted to little more than encouragement

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[182] Eric Rouleau, "States and stances," Le Monde, 22 October 1973.

[183] Abdel-Wahab Hechiche, "Conflict and resolution in Libyan-Tunisian relations," The Maghreb review 14, no. 1-2 (1989): 52; Martin Sicker, The making of a pariah state: The adventurist politics of Muammar Qaddafi (New York: Praeger, 1987), 55.

[184] Sicker, 55.

[185] First, 275.

for everyone else to fight Israel--was spurned by front-line Arab leaders. During May and June 1970 Qaddafi and his Foreign Minister visited Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt (Busair also visited Qatar, Kuwait, North and South Yemen) to outline a strategy for heightening Palestinian action against Israel; his scheme was dismissed as 'outdated, simplistic, and even impertinent.'[186]

True to character, Qaddafi urged the Egyptian president to press on fighting, a counsel delivered with 'characteristic disregard for military and political realities.'[187] Sadat retorted that Egyptian soldiers, rather than Libyans, were the ones dying on the front lines. Nevertheless, Qaddafi continued his criticisms of Sadat's limited war.[188] On November 17, Qaddafi gave the Egyptian media an open letter to Sadat which politely suggested Cairo's acceptance of a cease-fire had stained its honor. Guerrilla warfare, even if it led to complete devastation, would have been preferable, said Qaddafi.[189] No doubt it would have been--at least for Tripoli, which was in little danger of being visited by any devastation at all.

Fearing--with considerable prescience--that Sadat

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[186] Wright, 157.

[187] Harris, 39.

[188] Moammar Gadhafi, The battle of destiny (London: Kahari Publications, 1976), 62.

[189] El Saadany, 124-125.

would trade peace with Israel for the return of the Sinai, Qaddafi's hitherto mild criticisms took a harder tone. In an interview with the Lebanese magazine *Beirut Al Massa* he mocked the Arabs' performance in combat and stressed that the Egyptian army had clearly been defeated.[190] These criticisms were out of sync with Arab sentiment and damaged his own credibility more than Sadat's. For his part, Sadat dismissed the Libyan contribution to the war effort as negligible. In fact, the Libyans had contributed a squadron of Mirage fighters, thirty-six artillery pieces, one hundred anti-aircraft missiles, another hundred armored personnel carriers, and some 800,000 barrels of oil--a contribution worth roughly $700 million.[191] Furthermore, Egyptian naval units were given permission to operate from the Libyan base of Tobruk if necessary. While Sadat was ready to downplay this support Qaddafi was equally prepared to exaggerate it. In April 1974 he went so far as to claim that Libyan units were the first to cross the Suez Canal, a misrepresentation which incensed the Egyptian President.[192]

As 1973 drew to a close Qaddafi called for Egyptians and Palestinian guerrillas to foment a revolt against President Sadat to keep him from making peace with

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[190] Paul Martin, "Libya calls for revolt in Egypt to stop peace pact with Israel," Times, 29 December 1973.

[191] Wright, 164.

[192] El Saadany, 132.

Israel.[193] This was a momentous if somewhat pointless appeal. In calling for civil war Qaddafi was clearly crossing a line beyond which lay no hope of normal relations with Cairo, yet it is unclear what he hoped to gain--the Arab nationalist moral high ground, perhaps, but certainly not a change of Egyptian policy.

The key to understanding why Qaddafi engineered such a precipitous decline in his relations with Egypt may be the realization that whereas Sadat's war aims conflicted sharply with Qaddafi's own objectives, the Egyptian leader's new found stature impinged even more forcefully upon the Libyan leader's self-conception. It was no secret that Qaddafi regarded the Egyptian president as an unworthy successor to Nasser. By expunging the psychological damage the Arabs suffered in 1967, Sadat had usurped the heroic role which Qaddafi coveted.

Conclusion

Between 1969 and 1973, the new Libyan regime crafted a national security policy distinct from that of the previous government. Internally, the RCC consolidated its grip on power by dismembering the *ancien régime*, by rejecting any institutional checks on the Council's power, and by assaulting (albeit unsuccessfully) the tribal underpinnings of Libyan society. Within the RCC itself, Qaddafi dispensed with the pretence that he was

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[193] Paul Martin, "Libya calls for revolt in Egypt to stop peace pact with Israel," Times, 29 December 1973.

merely the *primus inter pares* and made control of security issues his sole prerogative. Independent thinkers were culled from the Council, leaving Qaddafi accountable only to himself. The Colonel believed it was for historians to judge whether he followed in Nasser's footsteps, not for the RCC and certainly not for the Libyan people.[194] Virtually unencumbered by political, economic, or constitutional restraints, the Libyan leader was free to adopt radical (yet ultimately counterproductive) policies in his search for security.

Libya, Qaddafi believed, was inherently insecure in a world dominated militarily by the superpowers, dominated economically by the West, and in which the Arab states were divided and weakened by the existence of the State of Israel. Achieving security therefore meant changing the status quo, which Qaddafi set out to do by allying himself with Nasser's Egypt, expelling U.S. and British forces from Libya, and modernizing Libya's armed forces. The seeming impunity with which he accomplished these goals encouraged him to adopt increasingly aggressive policies, especially in the Mediterranean where Qaddafi laid claim to the Gulf of Sirte and tried to expel NATO from Malta. There and elsewhere the Libyan leader's propensity for belligerence and confrontation rapidly became apparent: Libyan aircraft fired upon an American surveillance plane and an Italian warship in the disputed Gulf of Sirte. Libya shipped arms to the IRA

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[194] e.g., Bianco, 122.

and through its Jihad Fund lent support to numerous other terrorist movements. By and large, the leading Western powers did not hold Libya accountable for such behavior since they were fearful of turning Tripoli into a Soviet satellite. Few foresaw that restraint might merely embolden the Libyan leader.

Nevertheless, the first intimations of the counterproductive potential of Qaddafi's policies could now be glimpsed. Relations with the United States had dipped below ambassadorial representation. The U.S. Sixth Fleet had quietly contested Libya's claim to the Gulf of Sirte. Great Britain had angrily terminated its treaty of friendship and suspended arms sales. Most disturbingly of all, Libya's alliance with Egypt--the pillar of the regime's new national security policy--had been placed in jeopardy. Without an Egyptian front against Israel, security (as Tripoli conceived of it) would become unachievable, and Libya's new security policy irrelevant. Indeed, Libya's most important ally now threatened to become its most dangerous enemy (an ironic reversion to the threat environment of the Sanusi monarchy). As we shall see in the next chapter, Egypt was but the first of many allies that Qaddafi would so transform.

Chapter 2

From alliance to antagonism: Aggravating the Libyan security predicament, 1974-1980

It is a well-known fact that a weak party which has no strong and sincere ally cannot achieve anything.

-- Omar Al Meheishi,
RCC Member[1]

The deterioration of the rapport between Tripoli and Cairo forced Qaddafi to revisit his external security predicament, the general contours of which were consistent with the security dilemma faced by most Third World states. In an international security environment dominated by the conflict between two superpowers, Libya's considerable petroleum resources, seemingly strategic location, and small population exacerbated its sense of vulnerability. In short, Libya had the classic trappings of a Cold War pawn. Qaddafi therefore faced a choice: would he ally Libya with either of the competing potencies, or would he continue to pursue a strategy of non-alignment? The latter course did not necessarily immunize a state from superpower pressure, nor was it a guarantee against the designs of other powers. Moreover, choosing non-alignment left unanswered the question of whether Tripoli could continue its quest to upset the

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[1] As cited in Mary-Jane Deeb's Libya's foreign policy in North Africa, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 109; from an interview with Al-Ba'ath, 11 March 1975, translated in FBIS-MEA, 20 March 1975.

international status quo without first securing the patronage of another state to take the place of Nasser's Egypt.

In the case of Libya, however, the Third World security predicament was not deterministic.[2] Qaddafi's world view remained the guiding force behind Libyan national security policy, though Sadat's indifference to Qaddafi's aims compelled the Libyan leader to revise his Grand Strategy. Since Egypt had lost its way, Libya would no longer sublimate its efforts to Cairo's.[3] Henceforth, Libya would be the engine of Arab resurgence and would spare no expense in executing its role. Libya would create a powerful army, build fresh alliances, and aggressively assert its presence in the international arena. Moreover, it would discredit and punish those who contested its right to Arab leadership.

It sounded good in theory, but in the cold light of day Qaddafi could not make his Libyan juggernaut fly. By the end of the decade his revised Grand Strategy had not moved him appreciably closer to his political objectives, both because implementing his strategy proved more difficult than anticipated, and because its counterproductive effects were likewise unexpected.

Such unforeseen difficulties were especially manifest in Libya's quest for an ally, a quest marked by

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[2] In contrast to Deeb's view. Deeb, 91.

[3] Qaddafi articulated his 'go it alone' strategy in September 1974 with reference to southern Lebanon. SWB ME/4695/A/1, 5 September 1974.

a panoply of diplomatic initiatives and mutual defence agreements. At both the global and regional levels, Qaddafi was almost exclusively interested in partnerships framed by his terms, terms which usually sought to expand his authority (and even abrogate national borders) at the expense of the other party. Unsurprisingly, his prospective allies balked at this prospect. Moreover, Qaddafi was unwilling to circumscribe his own behavior to secure the benefits of an alliance. This reticence bedeviled his relationship with the Soviets in particular, who made restraint the price of their protection. This was a price that the Libyan leader simply could not contemplate. Thus, the salient truth made manifest during this epoch was Qaddafi's inability to maintain an alliance with anyone, despite superficial liaisons with Egypt, the USSR, Algeria, Tunisia, Malta, Niger and Sudan.[4] In fact, Libya consistently antagonized the very states it had sought to ally itself with, thereby aggravating its security predicament. In short, Qaddafi's fruitless quest for an ally--and what was even worse, the alienation of the states he attempted to rally to his side--exemplified the type of counterproductive behavior which we have posited to be irrational.

Qaddafi's feud with Sadat

The conflict between Qaddafi and Sadat was the

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[4] Deeb, 91.

definitive element of Libyan national security policy over the remainder of the decade. What began in 1973 as a rift in Libyan-Egyptian relations became, by 1980, an unbridgeable chasm. This distension was not inevitable; on several occasions the two states tried to iron out their differences. The reasons rapprochement eluded them were twofold. First, Qaddafi never relinquished his claim to Nasser's mantle, and he invested tremendous amounts of political capital into discrediting Sadat, whose press agents were already sniping at Nasser's memory. By disputing Sadat's right to deviate from Nasser's legacy, Qaddafi transmuted Egyptian domestic politics into a matter of Libyan foreign policy:

> Any attack levelled against the July 23 Revolution is considered a degradation of Gamal Abdul Nasser, an attack against the Libyan Revolution and a degradation of Mu'Ammar el-Qathafi.[5]

This was a blatant interference in Egyptian affairs, and the resultant friction amplified the antipathy already radiating between the two leaders. Had effective checks on executive power existed in either state then their mutual disdain might have had fewer foreign policy ramifications. As it was, the absence of checks allowed the animosity between the pair to grow into a bilateral crisis that cooler heads were unable to contain.

Although Soviet diplomats advised Qaddafi against

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[5] In an interview with Bassam Freiha, "Dialogue of principles," 2 August 1974, Al Anwar; reprinted in Muammar Qaddafi, Discourses by Mu'ammar el-Qathafi Chairman of R.C.C. published in the Arab and international press, (n.p.: Adam Publishers, 1975), 19.

personalizing the conflict, his disparagement of Sadat grew in ferocity and was answered by acerbic ripostes from Cairo.[6] These insults eventually left the political realm and grew extraordinarily personal, as when Tripoli lambasted Sadat with racial slurs mocking his dark pigmentation, or viciously maligned his wife.[7] Since the Libyan-Egyptian alliance had been based above all else on Qaddafi's affinity for Nasser, it was no surprise that these acidic exchanges swiftly eroded that alliance.

Corrosive exchanges do not, however, fully explain the enmity which supplanted the hitherto 'fraternal' relations between Cairo and Tripoli. Libyan strategic objectives *vis-à-vis* Egypt evolved in tandem with Qaddafi's denunciations of Sadat. Qaddafi's maximalist objectives (uniting Libya with Egypt, persuading Egypt to renew the war against Israel) gradually gave way to a new set of aims (preventing the formation of an Israeli-Egyptian peace, subverting the Sadat regime), an evolution that was mirrored in Libyan foreign policy as pleas for Arab unity gave way to calls for an Egyptian revolution. This evolution was not smooth, and its halting nature gave a chaotic sheen to Libyan diplomacy as Qaddafi vacillated between reconciliation and subversion. But the incessant drift towards subversion

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[6] Saleh El Saadany, Egypt and Libya from inside, 1969-1976. Mohamed M. El-Behairy, trans. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 1994), 147.

[7] Martin Sicker, The making of a pariah state: The adventurist politics of Muammar Qaddafi, (New York: Praeger, 1987), 58.

and extremism was the second and decisive factor in transforming Egypt from ally to enemy.

Libyan subversion first caught the world's attention on April 17, 1974, when approximately 20 members of the Shabab Muhammed (an outgrowth of Egypt's Islamic Liberation Party) tried to seize the Egyptian Military Technical Academy in Heliopolis. From there they planned to move against Sadat and topple the government. Eleven people were killed before the security forces restored order. The evidence implicating Libya in the uprising was admittedly circumstantial: the Shabab's Palestinian leader, Dr. Saleh Sariyya, had met Qaddafi while visiting Libya, possessed a Libyan as well as an Iraqi passport, and allegedly implicated Qaddafi as the inspirator of the attack during his subsequent interrogation.[8] Tripoli heatedly denied its involvement but was decidedly sympathetic to the rebels in its official references to the mutiny. To what extent Libya actively supported Sariyya remained unclear even after the trial. Although the prosecutor's report issued on April 25, 1974, did not mention Libya, the perception that Sariyya's puppet-strings led to Tripoli remained paramount. The Egyptian press excoriated Qaddafi.[9]

In any event, it was not long before Tripoli's

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[8] Deeb, 96.

[9] In an interview with Talal Salman on April 28, 1974, Qaddafi intoned: 'In our opinion the incident is suspicious and only the enemy benefits therefrom.' See "The issue of the revolution and the issue of unity," Assafir; reprinted in Qaddafi, 82; see also El Saadany, 133-135.

coercive measures became unambiguous. Having immediately suspended free oil deliveries once Sadat accepted a cease-fire, the following summer Qaddafi instructed the Libyan Air Force to demand the return of its Mirage aircraft since they were no longer needed for combat. When Hosni Mubarak, Commander of the Egyptian Air Force, proved reluctant to comply, Libya threatened to embarrass the Egyptians by publicizing the dispute. This merely made Cairo adamant. Libya therefore suspended deliveries of jet fuel to Egyptian MiG fighters training at Tobruk and all but imprisoned the Egyptian contingent stationed there. Tripoli proposed a simple trade: Egypt could resume flying its MiGs once the Mirages were returned. Egypt accepted, but once its pilots were reunited with their planes they promptly departed Tobruk for good. Furthermore, on August 4, 1974, Sadat ordered all Egyptian officers and advisers posted to Libya--nearly 7,000 personnel--to return to Egypt within 72 hours.[10]

No leader could be faulted for asserting the rights to his nation's military property. Qaddafi's tactics, however, affixed a costly price tag to a minor victory. Humiliating Sadat meant the prospects for reconciliation or for a reversal of Egyptian policy would be remoter than ever. The strategic had been sacrificed to the tactical.

Rather than minimizing the damage wrought by the Mirage affair, Qaddafi further inflamed matters by sowing

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[10] El Saadany, 137-140.

insurrection along the Egyptian frontier--an operation that again demonstrated paltry strategic thinking. Qaddafi chose the impoverished Bedouin tribes of Western Egypt to be his fifth column, astutely guessing they would be susceptible to his overtures because of their alienation from mainstream Egyptian society and because of their ancestral roots in Cyrenaica. He won their loyalty through financial aid--given with the condition that they accept new identification papers designating their homeland, the (Egyptian) Western desert, as the (Libyan) Eastern desert.

Egyptian officials were taken aback at this bald claim to their territory. Egyptian intelligence began monitoring the situation closely as of August 1974 while Cairo arranged a countering array of welfare initiatives.[11] By April 1975 Qaddafi had begun arming the tribesmen and the Egyptian government publicly accused Tripoli of interfering in Egypt's internal affairs.[12] Exposed but unrepentant, Tripoli continued fomenting insurrection among the tribes throughout the summer.[13] This covert policy became a festering sore in relations with Cairo until as late as May 1979, when twenty Libyan intelligence operatives were tried for attempting to persuade the tribes to forcibly annex the

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[11] El Saadany, 141.

[12] Deeb, 96; FBIS-MEA, 22 April 1975, D6.

[13] Deeb 96; FBIS-MEA, 8 July 1975, D1.

Siwah oasis to Libya.[14]

Measured against the standard of Libyan strategic objectives as Qaddafi defined them, the wisdom of subversion was not impressive. It made reconciliation problematic, yet fell short of effecting a change in Egyptian policy. Qaddafi maintained that forging ahead with Libyan-Egyptian unity (i.e., preserving the strategic partnership) was still his primary aim. After securing a tentative reconciliation with President Sadat in Lahore, Qaddafi played down their falling out as a 'sort of misunderstanding.' But he simultaneously implied that the Egyptians had already violated the understanding reached at Lahore.[15] For Qaddafi, the only alternative was conflict:

> To say the truth we predicted from the beginning what is going on now. We said that unless unity is achieved between the two countries the alternative would be clash. . . . They have no choice but to unite or collide since there is no justification for not realizing unity.[16]

On July 2, 1975, Tripoli requested that Egypt withdraw its military attaché and his staff. The following month witnessed a stand-off between Libyan and Egyptian armored units along the border, and minor clashes were reported

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[14] SWB ME/6105/A/1, 1 May 1979.

[15] In an interview with Fuad Mattar on April 14, 1974. "Inter-Arab relations," Al-Nahar; reprinted in Qaddafi, 62-63.

[16] In an interview with Dara Janikovic, "Comprehensive talk," Zagreb newspaper, April 29, 1974, reprinted in Qaddafi, 130-131.

on August 26.[17]

Well before these clashes took place the fissure between Tripoli and Cairo had already begun to figure into Libyan security planning. Qaddafi had hitherto relied upon Egypt to supply the requisite military hardware, expertise, and above all the manpower to guarantee his security at home and allow him to pursue his regional ambitions. To make good the loss of Egyptian patronage Qaddafi turned to the USSR in the final months of 1973. Within a matter of weeks the Libyan attitude towards the Soviet Union underwent a remarkable *volte face* on both the rhetorical and operational levels. In October 1973 Qaddafi had described the Soviets as the 'arch enemy of the Arab World' and ridiculed its 'miserable arms shipments.'[18] On numerous occasions Qaddafi asserted that Soviet interests were as inimical to the Arabs as American interests. Such anti-Soviet rhetoric disappeared once the Soviets indicated they would consider shipping more powerful weaponry to Tripoli. Gone too were the days when Libya would protest the formation of Arab-Soviet alliances, as when it recalled its ambassador from Iraq in February 1972. Qaddafi now perceived a harmony of Libyan-Soviet interests in opposing the 'American

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[17] Otto von Pivka, Armies of the Middle East, (Cambridge, England: Patrick Stephens, 1979), 121.

[18] Eric Rouleau, Le Monde, 22 October 1973.

onslaught.'[19]

Expressions of mutual admiration became common.[20] On March 27, 1974, Jalloud travelled to Moscow and negotiated a major arms sale. By mid-year Libya had received ten batteries of SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 anti-aircraft missiles manned by 1500 Soviet troops who supervised their emplacement around Uqbah Bin Nafi airbase. Accompanying the batteries was a Soviet Tu-22 (Blinder C) reconnaissance squadron, on loan but painted with Libyan colors.

In mid-May 1975 the Soviet Prime Minister, Aleksei Kosygin, paid a three-day visit to Tripoli. Shortly after his departure the Egyptian ambassador surreptitiously obtained a copy of the accords signed during the visit and found them 'mind-boggling.'[21] In exchange for roughly $4 billion Libya would receive some of the most advanced weaponry in the Soviet inventory, including hundreds of advanced tanks, MiG-23s and MiG-25s.

For Libya, far more than arms procurement was at stake. The introduction of Cold War overtones into its national security policy created a dynamic with the potential to draw Tripoli deeper into the global bipolar conflict. Consequently, Qaddafi dismissed the import of

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[19] Salman, 87.

[20] e.g., SWB SU/4691/A4,4, 29 August 1974; SU 4693/A$/3, 3 September 1974.

[21] El Saadany, 148.

his pivot towards Moscow by stressing the limits to Libyan-Soviet friendship:

> I must define the sense in which we use the word 'friendship,' which must not imply any kind of influence, and still less involves putting ourselves under Soviet protection When I speak of friendship I see it in terms of equality . . . True enough, in international relations every friendship has its price, but a friend must remain a friend, and, as for the USSR, although I have supported this friendship I neither wish, nor am I able, to go further.[22]

Qaddafi was sincere in his reticence. He was with Sadat in 1972 when the Soviet base commander at Marsa Matruh denied the Egyptian president entry to the base, a humiliation which marked the beginning of the end for Soviet naval privileges in Egypt. Qaddafi found such an arrangement intolerable and indeed had already made the exclusion of all foreign bases a matter of principle from which he could not easily back down.

But neither Moscow nor Cairo felt inclined to let Qaddafi escape the Cold War snare so easily. The Kremlin had compelling military and political reasons for maximizing its influence in Libya, reasons which are easily adduced. The Mediterranean Eskadra was in need of additional harbor and air facilities which in the event of war would help it neutralize the U.S. Sixth Fleet and divert the resources of NATO's southern command, Allied Forces Southern Europe, from the central European front. Moreover, the Soviets were eager to re-establish regional influence following their undignified exit from Egypt.

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[22] Mirella Bianco, Gadafi: Voice from the desert (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1975), 152.

Finally, adopting Libya made sense if for no other reason than denying that possibility to the West--the promise of cheap oil and hard cash was an added bonus. Qaddafi's reluctance to grant basing privileges was no great concern. Moscow trusted its weapons sales to create subtle bonds of dependency, forcing Libya to look to the Soviet bloc for ammunition, spare parts, and maintenance. The Soviet-Libyan relationship was thus unexceptional both in terms of Soviet Near Eastern policy and of Third World strategy.[23]

In fact, Smolansky's observations on the Soviet-Iraqi relationship are equally applicable to Libya:

> Specifically, Baghdad's interest in courting the Kremlin's goodwill and assistance was based on the need for a powerful patron in its efforts to shed all the remnants of Western colonialism and to establish Iraq as an autonomous member of the world order of nation states. It is important to recognize, however, that this goal never accommodated the notion of replacing one form of domination with another. For their part, the Soviet leaders were only too happy to assist any nation or movement intent on "throwing off the yoke of imperialism," for this was the heyday of the cold war and of Moscow's quest for recognition of its status as a global superpower. In the ebullient era of Khrushchevian expansionism, the leaders of the USSR were apparently convinced that any diminution of Western influence represented a gain for Soviet interests.[24]

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[23] See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, Moscow's Third World strategy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); see also Walter Laqueur, "Soviet dilemmas in the Middle East," in The U.S.S.R. and the Middle East, Michael Confino and Shimon Shamir, eds., (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973), 93; Lisa Anderson, "Qadhdhafi and the Kremlin," Problems of communism 34 (September-October 1985): 42-43.

[24] Smolansky, 280.

In Egypt, a furious Anwar Sadat (the Kremlin had snubbed his own bids to buy the same weaponry) denounced Libya as a Soviet surrogate.[25] Almost as soon as the Egyptian president received the text of the arms agreement, the semi-official *Al-Ahram* reported that Libya had agreed to establish Soviet air and naval bases on its territory. This, Sadat knew, was not true. But the Egyptian papers' insistence (they ran the story for four days), and Tripoli's inevitable denials, served to focus Western attention on Libya's Soviet ties.[26]

In accordance with Qaddafi's hegemonic aspirations, advanced offensive weapons topped Libya's post-1973 War shopping list. The navy underwent a particularly dramatic expansion. In 1974 Libya ordered four corvettes from Italy; four years later ten fast-attack boats were purchased from France. The Queen Elizabeth II fiasco had apparently convinced Qaddafi he needed his own submarine packs. His purchasing agents sounded out Great Britain with an offer to spend up to £1,000 million on six Vickers submarines and a number of Jaguar low-level strike aircraft, but the British were discouraging.[27]

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[25] Christopher Wren, "Russians deny signing pact to put Soviet bases in Libya," International Herald Tribune, 29 May 1975.

[26] "Libya said to sign Soviet arms pact," New York Times 23 May 1975; Henry Tanner, "Libyans confirm Soviet arms deal," New York Times 24 May 1975; Irene Beeson, "Press ignores bases denial," Guardian, 26 May 1975, and "Libya to get Soviet arms, but no bases," Guardian, 24 May 1975; Edmund Stevens, "Moscow denies Cairo report of Libya deal," Times, 28 May 1975.

[27] David Wood, "Downing street denies vetoing 1,000m Middle East arms order," Times, 12 April 1975.

The Kremlin, in contrast, was receptive. In July 1975 the CIA leaked news of a Soviet-Libyan deal for six submarines.[28] The following April Libya was also negotiating a $250 million deal with Spain for four Daphne-class submarines.[29] It was common knowledge that Libya's most fearsome new weapons, Scud missiles (which were unveiled during the 1st of September celebrations in 1976), were aimed at Egypt.[30]

Sadat countered such developments by playing up Libya's Soviet connection. Since expelling the Soviet military mission from Egypt in 1972, Sadat's distrust of the USSR had only deepened. As his memoirs and other records make clear, the Egyptian leader was genuinely alarmed by--some might even say consumed with--the Soviet threat.[31] Nevertheless, there was perhaps an element of mild theatrics in Sadat's denunciations of the Soviet-Libyan friendship. Increasing Washington's anxiety was one way of milking the Eisenhower Doctrine, which promised U.S. aid to states facing Soviet aggression. Moreover, the Libyan-Soviet threat provided a good pretext for military aid since Sadat could scarcely ask Washington for help against an Israeli threat while he

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[28] Egyptian Gazette, 2 July 1975.

[29] Middle East Economic Digest, 29 October 1976.

[30] Robert Fisk, "Libya poses new threat to Egypt with battery of Soviet Scud ground-to-ground missiles," Times, 3 September 1976.

[31] Ibrahim A. Karawan, "Egypt's defense policy," in Defense planning in less-industrialized states, ed. Stephanie G. Neuman, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1984), 153, 160.

was suing for peace.[32] In addition, the Egyptian military had a bureaucratic interest in playing up the Libyan threat to maintain their share of the national budget.[33]

As a result, the Egyptian media saw a Soviet base behind every Libyan oasis. In 1976 the Soviet Mediterranean Eskadra lost the last of its access privileges to Egyptian harbors and increased its use of Libyan ports (Qaddafi had granted limited access in 1975 to the ports of Tobruk and Bardiyah).[34] *Al-Gomhouriya* obligingly reported the Soviet 'occupation' of Uqbah Bin Nafi airbase (formerly Wheelus AFB), alleging Qaddafi cleared the base of Libyan officers and relinquished its operational control to the USSR.[35] To the contrary, Qaddafi's refusal to sanction a permanent Soviet presence was still the sticking point in his relations with Moscow.

Though prone to exaggerate the Soviet threat from Libya, Egyptian apprehensions were not entirely groundless. Between 1974 and 1975 the number of Soviet

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[32] Herman Eilts, "The United States and Egypt," in The Middle East ten years after Camp David, ed. William Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 143.

[33] Nazih N. Ayubi, Over-stating the Arab state (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995), 271.

[34] Gordon McCormick, "Soviet Strategic aims and capabilities in the Mediterranean: Part II," in Prospects for security in the Mediterranean, ed. Robert O'Neill, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1988), 41.

[35] "Russians take over base in Libya," Daily Telegraph, 29 April 1976; the story was also picked up by The Guardian on the same date.

military advisers in Libya doubled.[36] Soviet engineers built a new Libyan airbase (Banbah) which became operational in late 1979, and upgraded dock facilities in Tripoli and Bengahzi to receive the USSR's Mediterranean Eskadra. More alarmingly, Tripoli escalated its activities in Egypt from subversion to terrorism. A Libyan assassin attempted to murder an Egyptian journalist Ihsan 'Abd critical of Tripoli.[37] On March 6, 1976, three Libyans (one of whom was a Foreign Ministry official) were arrested at the Rome airport carrying automatic weapons and a handgrenade in hopes of assassinating former Libyan Foreign Minister (now opposition figure) Abdel Moneim El Huni.[38] Two days later, seven Libyan special forces soldiers were arrested for trying to kidnap El Huni and Major Omar El Meheishi (an RCC member who defected in 1975).[39] Twelve more Libyan agents were arrested at the Cairo airport.[40] Within days another twenty provocateurs, led by Libyan Captain Muhammad El Sharif, were arrested for plotting to kill the two opposition figures as well as for raising insurrection among the tribes of the Western desert.

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[36] Flora Lewis, "Russians in Libya increase sharply," New York Times, 21 February 1975.

[37] Deeb 1991, 97; FBIS-MEA, 7 August 1974, D1.

[38] "3 armed Libyans seized at Rome," New York Times, 7 March 1976.

[39] Henry Tanner, "Egypt says 7 Libyan soldiers admit kidnapping plot in Cairo," New York Times, 9 March 1976.

[40] "Egypt announces arrest of 12 more Libyan agents," New York Times, 13 March 1976.

Libya retaliated rather disproportionately by expelling 3,000 Egyptian workers.[41]

One Libyan provocation followed another during the spring and summer of 1976. In April the Libyan Ambassador to Egypt, Milod El Sedik Ramadan, opened fire on a student demonstration with a submachine gun, allegedly shouting 'I am the revolution--I will kill you all.'[42] Libyan-sponsored terrorists hijacked an Egypt Air Boeing 737 and demanded Meheishi as ransom; after Egyptian commandos stormed the plane, the captured terrorists revealed that Qaddafi had personally promised to pay them $300,000 for the operation.[43] In light of such trespasses, on June 30 the Libyan Ambassador was declared *persona non grata*.[44]

Within hours Libyan-supported Sudanese dissidents invaded Darfur to topple the Numeiri government, thereby surrounding Egypt with hostile regimes. This scheme backfired: Numeiri called for Egyptian aid in restoring order, which Cairo promptly sent. The rebellion was crushed and the Egyptian-Sudanese axis emerged stronger than before.

On August 16, 1976, the Egyptian Interior Minister,

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[41] "Libya said to oust 3,000 Egyptians," New York Times, 12 March 1976.

[42] "Libyan envoy opens fire on protesters at Cairo embassy," New York Times, 5 April 1976.

[43] "Egypt-Libya . . . mini-war," Africa Institute Bulletin, no. 9-10 (1977): 274.

[44] ibid.

General Hassan Hubsha, accused the Libyan leader of allocating one million dollars to foment a coup against Sadat. And indeed, Libyan operatives planted explosives in government offices and trains.[45] Sadat responded by stationing 30,000 Egyptian troops along the border.[46]

The breaking point came in the summer of 1977. Qaddafi derided as 'wicked and heretical' a defence pact concluded between Egypt, Syria, and Sudan in late February.[47] Throughout the spring Egypt and Libya accused each other of sponsoring terrorism. On July 11, 1977, the Egyptian Vice-President, Hosni Mubarak, along with the Egyptian Chief of Staff, travelled to Sudan and on to Chad to coordinate resistance to Libyan intervention there. The political editor of the Libyan news agency opined this trip gave Libya the right to take the offensive against its enemies, and a spokesman for the Libyan Foreign Ministry declared that Libya would not permit a foreign (i.e., Egyptian) presence in Chad to threaten its borders.[48] Israeli intelligence reportedly tipped off Egyptian officials of a Libyan plot to

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[45] Deeb, 98; see FBIS-MEA, 9 August 1976, and FBIS-MEA, 14 August 1976.

[46] Peter Gill, "Libya shows off Russian weapons," Daily Telegraph, 2 September 1976; see also FBIS-MEA, 13 August 1976.

[47] Hervé Bleuchot, Chroniques et documents libyens, 1969-1980, (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1983), 113.

[48] ibid., 240.

assassinate Sadat. For Sadat, this was the last straw.[49]

A series of border incidents ensued. According to an official Libyan spokesman, Egyptian troops attacked police posts at Al Malfa and Al Rebda on the night of June 14, seizing four prisoners. On the morning of June 25, the Egyptians allegedly attacked three more posts (at Farnich, Motaradh and Solb Ennass) and took six more prisoners. After Egypt refused to respond to three diplomatic notes protesting these attacks, a Libyan patrol captured 13 Egyptian soldiers. The Egyptians then occupied territory claimed by Libya, prompting the Libyan regional military commander on July 17, 1977, to threaten his Egyptian counterpart with the promise of a strong and vigorous riposte.

The Egyptian version of events, as described by Cooley, maintains that a Libyan patrol in Egyptian territory killed nine soldiers, and that Egyptian units chased them to Musaad, destroying 40 tanks, two aircraft, and capturing some forty prisoners.[50] Whether in response to a Libyan assault or not, Sadat had decided to teach Qaddafi a lesson. Egyptian forces occupied the village of Musaad while planes bombed the village of Al

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[49] Mohamed Heikal, Autumn of fury (New York: Random House, 1983), 94-95; Ronald Bruce St. John, Qaddafi's world design: Libyan foreign policy, 1969-1987, (London: Saqi Books, 1987): 60.

[50] Cooley, however, gets his dates wrong. The first clashes occurred in June, not July. John Cooley, Libyan sandstorm: The complete account of Qaddafi's revolution (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 121.

Bordj.[51] Egyptian armored units then penetrated about 15 miles inland along the coast. The following day the air force attacked radar installations and aircraft on the ground at the former British airbase of El Adem, while infantry units conducted an airborne assault at Kasr Jidda. The Egyptian planes inflicted little damage in their first raid on the base but fared better during a follow up sortie on July 23. Additional actions took place at Tobruk, Kufra, Jarabub, and Barada.

Propagandistic coverage of the campaign produced conflicting assessments of Libyan combat performance.[52] For example, the Libyans said they shot down 17 enemy planes; Egypt admitted losing two. The Libyans claimed that People's Militia units, rather than the regular army, bore the brunt of the fighting.[53] While the Militia was mobilized, its role may have been exaggerated to disguise an undistinguished performance by the regular army.[54] Major Jalloud summarized Libya's losses as 27 dead and 9 missing, with only two planes lost and nine tanks damaged.[55]

On July 24, only three days after the offensive

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[51] Bleuchot, 240-242.

[52] e.g., John Wright, Libya: A modern history, (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 205; Sicker, 57.

[53] Financial Times, 27 July 1977.

[54] Omar I. El Fathaly and Monte Palmer, Political development and social change in Libya, (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1980), 122.

[55] Cooley, 122; find Jalloud statement on 1 August 1977.

began, both nations agreed to a cease-fire.[56] Why Sadat acquiesced to this early termination remains unclear two decades later. Sadat passes over the war in his autobiography, and neither the military objectives of his punitive campaign nor the deliberations within the Egyptian war room were made public. We must therefore try to deduce how Libyan national security policy bore upon Sadat's decision.

The possibility that Sadat was coerced by the Soviets can safely be excluded. There is no evidence to suggest that Moscow contemplated military intervention on Libya's behalf or pressured Cairo during the course of the conflict, despite a brusque warning in April.[57] Perhaps the Soviets misread the Carter administration's commitment to Sadat; whereas President Ford had assured Sadat of U.S. protection from Soviet retaliation if he attacked Libya, President Carter had withdrawn that pledge. In fact, the Egyptians later complained that Washington had unduly restrained them.[58] On the other hand, the U.S. may have encouraged the destruction of a

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[56] William J. Foltz, "Libya's military power," in The green and the black, ed. René Lemarchand, 52-69, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), 59.

[57] In April Moscow warned: "If the Egyptian leadership drives the situation toward a clash with Libya, and if it continues in its efforts to attack the current regime in Libya, it must realize that full responsibility for the results, which are difficult to anticipate, rests upon Egypt" (Deeb, 109; FBIS-MEA, 28 April 1977, D1).

[58] Eilts, 131; Lillian Craig Harris, "Libya and Egypt: Reflections on an old love affair," The Maghreb Review 14, no. 1-2 (1989), 31, 40.

newly installed Soviet air-defence radar system as a tactical objective for the campaign.[59] Three Soviet technicians reportedly died manning one of these radar stations, and the Egyptians exploited news of their deaths as additional proof that Libya had become a Soviet surrogate.[60] Moscow did little more than sheepishly condemn the Egyptian adventure and send its Chief of Staff around to take more arms orders. This muted response, bordering on indifference, was perhaps a cloaked rebuke to Qaddafi for failing to concede basing privileges.

The USSR was not the only power Tripoli had courted. On December 28, 1975, Libya and Algeria undertook to defend each other from external aggression by signing the Hassi Mas'ud Treaty, which Deeb hails as inaugurating 'the most important alliance in North Africa during the 1970s.'[61] The Libyan-Algerian entente was indeed a source of concern to Tunisia and more especially to Morocco, which watched with alarm as Libya and Algeria coordinated their support of the Polisario. By one estimate, Libya assumed roughly 80% of the costs of arming the Polisario in the mid-1970s. Tons of weapons and fuel were shipped across southern Algeria via what the Moroccans described as the 'Qaddafi trail.'

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[59] Deeb, 109; FBIS-MEA, 25 July 1977 D24 and N3.

[60] Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, "Egypt," in Security in the Middle East, ed. Samuel F. Wells Jr. and Mark A. Bruzonsky, 61-88 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 75.

[61] Deeb, 105.

However, the Hassi Mas'ud Treaty owed itself as much to the clash of Libyan and Algerian interests as to their convergence. Algerian President Boumédiène was less interested in supporting Qaddafi than in containing the Colonel's regional machinations, particularly his proposed unions with Egypt and Tunisia. For example, in a speech at Algiers on February 19, 1974, Boumédiène made no secret of his annoyance that Qaddafi had not consulted him regarding a proposed Libyan-Tunisian merger. Emphasizing their divergent outlooks, the Algerian President added: 'Qaddafi says he is a Nasserist. We ourselves are neither Nasserist nor anything else of the sort.'[62] Algerian radio denounced the Jerba accord as a 'shady agreement.'[63]

Nowhere was the divergence of Libyan and Algerian interests more apparent than in their Saharan and Sahelian diplomacy. Boumédiène derisively dismissed Qaddafi's plans for a "United States of the Sahara" as unrealistic and was disturbed by the Libyan quest for regional hegemony.[64] The two states engaged in a bidding war for the allegiance of neighboring state (e.g., Niger) and non-state actors (e.g., the Polisario). Libya's petroleum earnings gave it the advantage in this contest. For example, between 1970 and 1981 Algeria supplied

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[62] Bianco 1975, 189.

[63] El Saadany, 129.

[64] Nicole Grimaud, La politique extérieure de l'Algérie, (Paris: Karthala, 1984), 327-328.

approximately $4.76 million dollars in aid to Niger, whereas Libya gave an estimated $99.57 million. Differing allocation policies revealed a further clash of interests. Whereas Algeria generally directed its aid to governments, Libya deliberately channeled its funds to non-governmental actors (frequently Islamic organizations) to destabilize central governments.[65] Even their mutual support of the Polisario did not erase fundamental differences of opinion. Algeria supported the establishment of an independent republic in the Western Sahara whereas Qaddafi favored integrating the territory with Mauritania.

These differences might have been inconsequential had Qaddafi not chosen to contest the demarcation of the Algerian border. In September 1976 the Libyan government published maps attributing to itself some 135,200 square kilometers of territory pertaining to Algeria, Niger, and Chad. To Algeria's fury, Qaddafi declared his territorial claims non-negotiable; by the time of the 1977 War it had thus become clear that the Libyan-Algerian alliance was transient at best. Although Libya and Algeria continued to mouth pleasantries about unity until 1980, no serious progress was ever made or attempted. The last vestiges of alliance were erased in 1981 when Qaddafi attempted to establish oil wells on

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[65] Louis Blin, L'Algérie du Sahara au Sahel, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), 363, 359. Blin attributes Qaddafi's approach to 'racial paranoia,' taking the Green Book's wisdom on Africans as evidence that Qaddafi feared a 'black peril' (355-356).

Algerian territory north of Ghat and sent army units into the disputed region.[66]

As is endemic in international relations, the absence of primary sources introduces a conjectural note into any analysis of Algerian intercession in the 1977 War. Facts have been muddled with tenuous assumptions. On 24 July--hours before the cease-fire was announced--Sadat and Boumédiène held a private meeting in Alexandria during which the Algerian President urged a cessation of hostilities. According to Cooley, Boumédiène made 'vague hints' of military intervention. Without hard evidence to back up this assertion, Deeb leaves open the question of whether Boumédiène threatened force but concludes that irrespective of the tactics used, Algerian intervention was decisive in ending the conflict.[67] Libyan statecraft had, it seemed, been vindicated.

Yet even this conclusion seems premature. Coincidence is not proof of causality, and Deeb's assertion rests solely on coincidence. Furthermore, it stems from a grave misconstrual of the Libyan-Algerian entente. To the extent which Algeria used Libya to offset Egyptian power, it did so on its own terms and for its own geopolitical purposes; the 'alliance' was not the product of distinguished Libyan diplomacy and was never

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[66] The border dispute was yet another legacy of colonial rule. For a review of its historical origins see Blin, 314-317.

[67] Deeb, 105. In contrast, Cooley concludes that 'it was most probably Egypt's losses, rather than Arab mediation, that caused Sadat to halt what might have otherwise become a wider North African war' (Cooley, 122).

more than an open marriage of convenience. There was no joint military planning, no joint exercises, no exchange of officers, no standardization of doctrine and equipment. As we have seen, the entire venture was marred by conflicting interests abroad and a serious border dispute. Significantly, Boumédiène did not attempt to mediate in the prelude to the 1977 War, unlike President Nyasingbe Ayadema of Togo, President Ahmed Sekou Touré of Guinea, and Yasser Arafat of the PLO. Far from signifying unflinching support for an embattled ally, Algerian intercession on Libya's behalf in 1977 was most likely an attempt to regain some leverage over Tripoli while avoiding embarrassment should Qaddafi invoke the Hassi Mas'ud treaty. Furthermore, if Algeria opposed an Egyptian incursion into Libya, it would most likely have arrived at that stance regardless of the Libyan regime.

Indeed, the truly decisive factor in Sadat's deliberations was probably the mood of his own forces. Sadat had not finished rooting out the Nasserists from his officer corps, many of whom sympathized with Qaddafi's criticisms of Egyptian policy and resented fighting against fellow Arabs. One such officer was the Army Chief of Staff, Muhammed Ali Fahmi, whom Sadat relieved of command not long afterwards. Sadat doubtlessly ascribed more importance to averting mutiny than to placating Algeria. This interpretation is strengthened by Hinnebusch's suggestion that Sadat

devised the 1977 War as a probing operation prior to a larger campaign, which was also scuttled by resistance within the armed forces.[68]

The resultant picture of the Libyan-Algerian entente differs sharply from the one Deeb paints. The Hassi Mas'ud treaty helped to precipitate the 1977 War, since Sadat responded by granting asylum and support to Libyan dissident Omar Al Meheishi and by signing a defence treaty with Sudan the following summer. While the calculated risk of a Libyan-Algerian alignment was not inherently irrational, the same cannot be said of Qaddafi's subsequent behavior. At the precise moment when Libya should have zealously deepened its friendship with Algiers, the Libyan leader sabotaged his own foreign policy by attempting to alter his southwestern border.

From a military perspective, the border war was thus a conflict with no clear winners or losers. Viewed politically, the war was a failure for Sadat as it produced no appreciable moderation of Libyan behavior. Quite the reverse occurred: Qaddafi, portraying himself as the victim of Egyptian aggression, renewed his covert campaign against Sadat and set about bolstering his forces. Nevertheless, the 1977 War exposed Libya's strategic vulnerability. The ambiguity of the Algerian response and the flaccid Soviet reaction demonstrated that Tripoli had not resolved its security predicament.

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[68] Raymond A. Hinnebusch Jr. Egyptian politics under Sadat, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 130.

The strategic aftermath of 1977

Having emerged from battle relatively unscathed, Qaddafi took only halting steps towards resolving his underlying security predicament. These steps consisted of an indecisive tightening of his relations with Moscow and an increased pace of militarization at home. In 1978 Libya became the first state outside the Warsaw Pact to receive MiG-25s.[69] By 1979 Qaddafi was discussing terms for expanding the Mediterranean Eskadra's access to Libyan ports. Nevertheless, he still hoped to guarantee Libyan security through sheer mass of arms rather than through external support.

That Libya directed much of its business to non-Soviet suppliers while expanding its arsenal reveals the unresolved tension in Qaddafi's thinking between cultivating the USSR and preserving his autonomy. For example, Libya contracted to buy more than $100 million worth of arms from Brazil and obtained Yugoslavian aid in producing ammunition and spare parts for its Soviet weaponry. In August 1978, Major Jalloud appealed to North Korea for pilots and within months dozens had arrived (prompting a note of protest to Pyongyang from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry in 1979 and a direct demarche by Mubarak in 1980).[70] Libyan diplomats continued their tenacious haggling for the four Daphne

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[69] Wall Street Journal, 24 August 1977.

[70] New York Times, 12 February 1979; SWB ME/6046/A/5, 19 February 1979.

class submarines they had long sought from Spain.[71] In July 1979 Abu Bakr Yunis Jabir hosted the Turkish defense minister to ensure Libyan cadets could continue to train in Turkey, and Libya ordered five hundred jeeps and a number of coastal patrol boats from Ankara.[72]

The militarization of Libyan society accelerated. The long-standing disequilibrium between equipment and manpower in the armed forces was redressed through a proliferation of military academies such as the Air Defence College in Tripoli, which Qaddafi inaugurated in June 1979. Separate Air Force Colleges were established in Misratah and Tripoli. When the latter institute graduated its first class of 100 pilots and technicians, Major Jalloud paid tribute to their Czechoslovakian and Pakistani instructors.[73] Meanwhile Abu Bakr Yunis Jabir inaugurated the Libyan Naval Academy.[74]

This growth was still too slow for Qaddafi's satisfaction. In his Id al-Adha address the Colonel pledged to ask the General People's Congress to turn all schools into military camps with the goal of mobilizing 500,000 regular soldiers "to counter the crusading campaign which now threatens our very existence."[75] Soon

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[71] SWB ME/6142/A/9, 15 June 1979.

[72] SWB ME/6178/C/1, 27 July 1979.

[73] SWB ME/6515/A/8, 5 September 1980; SWB ME 6509/A/4, 29 August 1980.

[74] SWB/ME/6511/A/4, 1 September 1980.

[75] SWB ME/6556/A/2, 23 October 1980.

"spontaneous" demonstrations broke out as students obligingly clamored for total mobilization and the transformation of their schools into more bellicose institutions.[76]

Relations with Egypt after 1977

The 1977 War, followed by Sadat's historic trip to Israel in November, erased any hope that Libyan national security policy would transcend Qaddafi's feud with Sadat. At least by delivering the coup d'grace to reconciliation it solidified Sadat's removal as Qaddafi's foremost strategic objective. During a news conference on August 2, 1977, Jalloud dismissed the possibility of unity with Egypt so long as Sadat was in power. Libyan newspapers echoed the theme, arguing that it was impossible to reach an understanding with Sadat.

Likewise, the Egyptian Chief of Staff, Lt. General Ahmad Badawi, complained that Libyan behavior was 'not based on national objectives or logic.'[77] A case in point was the creation of an elaborate system of earthen fortifications (designed and constructed with Bulgarian and Soviet aid) along the eastern border, supported by newly built airfields.[78] The estimated cost of this 280-300km Maginot line (curiously out of touch with the fluid nature of desert warfare and the lessons of the 1973 War)

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[76] SWB ME/6572/A/1, 11 November 1980.

[77] SWB ME/6379/i, 25 March 1980.

[78] SWB ME/6379/A/1, 25 March 1980.

was estimated at $3 billion.[79]

Tripoli portrayed these fortifications as a direct result of the Camp David Treaty which supposedly brought an 'increased threat of an Egyptian military assault.'[80] The peace dividend for Egypt was significant: a promise of billions of dollars worth of U.S. arms and aircraft, as well as the freedom to redeploy units away from the Sinai front. By May the reinforced Egyptian western command was conducting sizable maneuvers at Sidi al-Barrani; even worse, the Egyptian army was embarking on joint exercises with American forces. In light of such exercises, the Libyans deemed their earthworks to be 'simple precautions.'[81] Egypt, Qaddafi told his military cadets, was now a U.S. military camp.[82]

Deeb submits that Qaddafi 'mellowed' and became 'more conciliatory' to the U.S. immediately after the Camp David accords of 1978. Her evidence is unpersuasive: did Qaddafi really sound 'apologetic' when he said Western policy 'compelled' him to 'resort to the Soviet Union and to be hostile to the U.S.'?[83] In fact, Qaddafi's flamboyant response to Camp David was a threat

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[79] Wright, 206; SWB ME/6438/A/3, 6 June 1980; George Joffé, "Libya: The decline of Qadafi," Middle East International no. 127 (20 June 1980): 8; see also SWB ME/6448/A/8, 18 June 1980.

[80] "Call to boycott American goods," Jamahiriya Review, no. 2 (July 1980); SWB ME/6665/A/7, 5 March 1981.

[81] "Union with Syria against Zionism and reactionary plots," Jamahiriya Review, no. 4 (September 1980), 8.

[82] SWB ME/6407/A/1, 29 April 1980.

[83] Deeb, 120.

to join the Warsaw Pact!

The next three years were marked by recriminations, threats, and saber-rattling. Libyan diplomats somberly raised the 'Egyptian threat' with their Soviet counterparts whenever possible. At each stop during his July 1979 Middle East tour, Qaddafi warned Arab leaders that Egypt would soon renew its 'onslaught' against Libya.[84] At the annual celebration of the American departure from Wheelus Field, the Colonel berated the 'unholy alliance' between Washington and Cairo.[85]

The Egyptians were equally adept at milking the propaganda value of Libyan-Soviet relations. When in 1979 Libyan and Soviet officials held talks regarding privileges for the Soviet navy, *Al-Akhbar* sarcastically noted that the Soviet fleet already used Libyan ports and suggested the entire country was tantamount to a Soviet base.[86] The following year the Egyptian Defence Minister stated:

> As for the balance of power with other neighboring states, we are certainly watching very attentively the Soviet activity regarding arms supplies to Libya. Soviet experts and arms in Libya exceeds the capacity of the Libyan armed forces and Libyan people to absorb them.[87]

The Egyptian Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Muhammad Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazalah, told *Al-Ahram* that communism

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[84] SWB ME/6179/A/3, 28 July 1979.

[85] SWB ME/6139/i, 12 June 1979.

[86] SWB ME/6125/i, 25 May 1979.

[87] SWB ME/6432/A/3, 30 May 1980.

was the 'real danger' in the Middle East and cited Libya and Ethiopia as extensions of the Soviet threat. *Le Point* reported that Libya was creating a Soviet naval base at Bardia.[88] Sadat impressed similar themes upon President Carter, not always successfully. During one dinner party he told how Qaddafi had massacred many of his colleagues in cold blood; Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Adviser, dismissed the story as fictional.[89]

In any event, while Libya insisted that each and every Egyptian field exercise was preparation for an invasion, it never conceded Egypt's defence concerns were legitimate.[90] After rocket exercises at Hamadah al-Hanra, Libya boasted its rockets could hit targets hundreds of kilometers away.[91] Later that year Tripoli announced its missiles were capable of being fired at targets 'across the border.'[92] Frictional encounters, such as an incident between an Egyptian submarine and a Libyan naval vessel near Sallum, were depicted as pretexts for Egyptian aggression.[93] In a typical display

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[88] SWB ME/6504/A/4, 22 August 1980; SWB ME/6508/A/6, 28 August 1980.

[89] Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983).

[90] SWB ME/6116/i, 15 May 1979.

[91] SWB ME/6053/A/3, 27 February 1979.

[92] SWB ME/6209/i, 3 September 1979.

[93] SWB ME/6107/A/7, 3 May 1979.

of siege mentality, Libya commemorated the tenth anniversary of the American withdrawal from Wheelus Air Force Base with a simulation of repulsing a hostile landing force.[94]

Tempers hit the boiling point again in the summer of 1980. On June 11, Qaddafi reiterated his plea for a rebellion of the Egyptian armed forces. A week later Sadat declared a state of emergency on the border. Badawi, now Minister of Defence, stressed that the state of emergency was necessary to combat Libyan infiltration and sabotage on the border: 100 instances of infiltration were logged during the first quarter of 1980 (down from a total of 3000 cases in 1977).[95]

Qaddafi's repeated calls for an Egyptian revolution showed that his conception of Libyan external security remained static. So far as Tripoli was concerned, Sadat's policies--from the Camp David accords to Cairo's warm relations with Washington--were tantamount to a declaration of war.[96] In the words of the Libyan Foreign Ministry:

> The freedom of the Libyan people will always be in danger so long as American imperialism continued to lurk in Egyptian territory and turn Egypt into a base for aggression. But it is not the Libyan people's job to overthrow the treason in Egypt. It is in the first place the responsibility of the Egyptian people and

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[94] SWB ME/6443/i, 12 June 1980.

[95] SWB ME/6458/A/3, 30 June 1980.

[96] SWB ME/6450/A/5-6, 20 June 1980.

Egyptian army.[97]

With this approach to problems of international security, at times the Libyan regime's threat perception seemed to border upon paranoia. For example, when an Israeli General Staff delegation visited Egypt, Tripoli alleged that Israel and Egypt were plotting a joint invasion of Libya.[98] Only a few years earlier the thought of such a joint Egyptian-Israeli operation would have been beyond the pale of credulity. Yet Qaddafi's incessant abuse of Sadat had made this almost inconceivable operation possible, or so the Israeli Prime Minister boasted to the U.S. President.[99] To the extent that it materialized, Egypt's anti-Libya contingency planning with Israel was the result of Qaddafi's fulfilling his own prophecy.

The price of truculence was insecurity. In response to Libya's border provocations (and the general atmosphere of animosity), Cairo mustered six infantry divisions, six motorized infantry divisions, three airborne battalions and three air defense brigades along its western frontier, with air and naval support on call.[100] Libya countered with a general mobilization and cleared hospitals to handle casualties.[101] On August 15,

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[97] SWB ME/6458/A/2, 30 June 1980.

[98] "Sadat's military forces ready to strike Libya," Jamahiriya Review, no. 3 (August 1980): 7.

[99] Jimmy Carter, Keeping faith: Memoirs of a president (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 414.

[100] Jamahiriya Review, no. 13 (April 1981), 14.

[101] SWB ME/6456/i, 27 June 1980.

1980, Egypt sent a letter to the UN Security Council blaming Libya for the racing border tensions.[102] Three days later the Egyptian Ministry of Defence upgraded its alert status.[103]

Qaddafi's actions and rhetoric were quite clearly increasing the likelihood of a return to the border war of 1977, a resumption of fighting which Libya, despite its ever-growing arsenal, would be unlikely to win. Nevertheless, the Colonel continued to deliberately escalate tensions. He again called upon the Egyptian army to seize control of the government.[104] And he made what some perceived as a threat to employ weapons of mass destruction against Cairo: (Libya) 'possesses such weapons and manpower as to be capable of destroying the whole of Egypt.'[105]

Qaddafi moved Libya to a war-footing with a call for general mobilization. Tripoli Voice of the Arab Homeland reported:

> He (Qaddafi) said that Sadat was carrying out continuous provocations and that the Libyan people would eventually reach a point where they could no longer accept such provocations or defiance even if it is America defying them. He added that the manoeuvres by the American forces along the Libyan borders were the very height of defiance. He affirmed that we should show the Egyptian army that we had no confrontation with it but with Sadat and America . . . The leader emphasized that what

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[102] SWB ME/6498/A/5, 15 August 1980.

[103] SWB ME/6503/i, 21 August 1980.

[104] SWB ME/6517/A/2, 8 September 1980.

[105] SWB ME/6513/A/5, 3 September 1980.

> he was saying about Egypt also applied to another neighboring Arab state (i.e., Tunisia).[106]

In December 1980, *Al-Ahram* reported that Libya was moving additional troops to its eastern border.[107]

Nominally, Libyan strategic objectives *vis à vis* Egypt after 1973 fluctuated between reconciliation, effecting a reversal of Egyptian foreign policy, and deposing Sadat, though pursuing the former objective had essentially been made contingent upon achievement of the latter two. By 1980, Qaddafi had resoundingly failed to achieve any of these objectives. He had, however, transformed his former ally into his most serious enemy. This wanton aggravation of the Libyan security predicament was repeated to a remarkable degree with Algeria and, as we shall see, with Tunisia, Malta, Niger, and Sudan as well.

Ally Tunisia?

Libya's dalliance with its northeastern neighbor began in earnest in December 1972 when, during a speech at the Palmarium, Qaddafi appealed directly to the Tunisian people to unite with Libya. In theory, a Libyan-Tunisian union promised a number of strategic benefits to each. Tunisia represented manpower, technical sophistication, and control over a key Mediterranean choke point. Libya offered oil wealth and

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[106] SWB ME/6581/A/3, 21 November 1980.

[107] SWB ME/6596/i, 9 December 1980.

an outlet for Tunisia's swelling population. Together the two individually weak states could form a significant force in North Africa.

But Qaddafi's fervent pleas did not sway the formidable President Habib Bourguiba, who was just as ardent in propounding his vision of Tunisian interests as Qaddafi was in promoting his own ideals. Bourguiba, who had been watching Qaddafi's speech on television, rushed to the scene and admonished the Colonel that Arab unity was decades and perhaps centuries away. The Tunisian leader cagily agreed to a series of bilateral cooperation agreements in lieu of unification.

The divergence in their approaches to Arab unity, as well as to the Arab-Israeli conflict, accentuated differences in their world views. Bourguiba, an unabashed Francophone, was scorned by pan-Arabists for his moderate, pro-Western orientation. Considerable evidence suggests that the two men held each other in derision. Qaddafi urged Bourguiba to proclaim a cultural revolution and smash the Destour party. Bourguiba dismissed Qaddafi's criticisms as infantile.[108] Their one shared trait, a belief that they had been destined to lead, was more conducive to rivalry than partnership.

Great was the shock, therefore, when on January 12, 1974, the two rulers proclaimed they would blend their countries into a single Islamic Arab Republic. What had produced this seismic shift in Bourguiba's thinking?

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[108] Bianco, 191.

Though only in his early seventies, the Tunisian's judgement was already beginning to fail. Qaddafi--acting in collaboration with Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Masmoudi--had cannily played to Bourguiba's vanity, agreeing that the latter would preside over the new republic. It beggars belief to suggest Qaddafi would willingly sublimate his state to Tunisian leadership; doubtless, he planned to ease himself into Bourguiba's chair. After a mere forty-five minute audience, a radiant Qaddafi secured Bourguiba's endorsement of the merger, which the young Libyan had hastily outlined on a sheet of hotel stationary.[109]

The Jerba accord horrified Tunisia's political elite just as the prospect of unity with Libya had outraged urbane Cairenes. Qaddafi scarcely had time to savor his victory before Tunisian Prime Minister Hedi Nouira set about derailing the proposed merger. Within forty-eight hours Foreign Minister Masmoudi was sacked and the Jerba agreement subjected to withering criticism in the Tunisian National Assembly. In the words of a senior Tunisian official, the scheme died after an existence of only four hours.[110]

The demise of the Islamic Arab Republic need not have precluded the establishment of a less ambitious alliance which could still have afforded considerable

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[109] Derek Hopwood, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), 90.

[110] Abdel-Wahab Hechiche, "Conflict and resolution in Libyan-Tunisian relations," The Maghreb Review 14 no. 1-2 (1989), 56.

strategic benefit to Libya. But Qaddafi, incensed at being thwarted, found it impossible to scale down his objectives to political reality. Over the next year he waffled between attempting to resurrect the Djerba accord, pressuring Tunisia to alter its Western orientation, and orchestrating the downfall of the Bourguiba regime.

Qaddafi seemed blissfully unaware that subversion and reconciliation were mutually exclusive. In February he called for a Tunisian revolution and pledged his support.[111] This was an outrageous step, one no government could quietly brook. When revolution failed to materialize, Qaddafi placed revolt in abeyance and tried to resurrect the Djerba agreement. Tunis naturally rebuffed these advances and refused to repatriate Libyan dissident Omar Al Meheishi. In March 1976 Libya retaliated by deporting 7,000 Tunisian workers. Simultaneously, several Libyans were arrested for attempting to assassinate Tunisian officials, including Prime Minister Hedi Nouira, who had been instrumental in nullifying the Jerba agreement.[112]

Eventually, the allure of fomenting a rebellion was too much for Qaddafi to resist. On January 27, 1980, a mixed contingent of some 50 mercenaries and Tunisian dissidents crossed into Tunisia and assaulted the police station, militia headquarters, and army barracks in the

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[111] In a speech at Zaouira on 10 February. Hechiche, 57.

[112] Deeb, 97; FBIS-MEA, 2 April 1976, I1.

town of Gafsa.[113] At the barracks the rebels caught a number of inexperienced recruits unawares and massacred them in their beds. But once Tunisian reinforcements arrived the insurgents themselves were all killed or captured. Numbered among the prisoners was the leader of the guerilla team, Ezzadine Cherif, who admitted that he and his men had trained in Libyan camps.

The Libyan Foreign Ministry flatly denied Tripoli's involvement:

> SPLAJ has no direct or indirect connection with the events which are taking place in the town of Gafsa and the attempts by the Tunisian Government to blame the SPLAJ for these events are aimed at preoccupying the Tunisian public with its internal problems and preventing it from learning the real motives which had led in the past and in the present to events and popular uprisings.[114]

But such denials were a shade less than credible when juxtaposed with the bellicose rhetoric emanating from Tripoli. JANA hailed the fighters as leaders of a people's revolution and expressed solidarity with the Tunisian masses in their fight against the 'fascist' government. Within days Qaddafi added his imprimatur to this policy, declaring:

> We consider the Tunisian regime as an adversary of the Libyan Republic in Libya. The logical solution is in the pursuit of the struggle until the disappearance of this adversary. . . . We admit no mediation, neither peace nor armistice in the struggle which opposes us to

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[113] The attack marked the anniversary of a Tunisian uprising, and may also have been timed to shift the international spotlight to Libya. P. Edward Haley, Qaddafi and the United States since 1969, (New York: Praeger, 1984), 118.

[114] SWB ME/6335/A/6, 2 February 1980.

the Tunisian regime.[115]

Tripoli radio broadcast calls for the Libyan people to 'work with their Tunisian brothers to topple this agent regime' well into March.[116]

Tunisian Prime Minister Nouira turned to Paris, and to a lesser extent Washington, for assistance against Qaddafi's 'expansionist aims.' The United States obligingly sent elements of the Sixth Fleet to the Gulf of Gabes.[117] France despatched three warships and two submarines, along with transport planes to ferry Tunisian reinforcements.[118] Officially, the only French units to actually touch Tunisian soil were two helicopters and two Transall transport aircraft.[119] Qaddafi and his band denounced this 'French invasion' of 'fraternal Tunisia,' but Jalloud paradoxically taunted Tunis to request 'more French and US troops because we are with the Tunisian troops ready to fight them both.'[120] Speaking to *Libération*, Qaddafi warned Paris it was 'risking effects on other areas of North Africa, and perhaps, all Africa.' On February 4, a Libyan mob set fire to the French embassy.[121]

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[115] Hechiche, 58; Haley, 114-15.

[116] SWB ME/6379/i, 25 March 1980.

[117] New York Times, 1 February 1980.

[118] SWB ME/6334/i, 1 February 1980; Haley, 112.

[119] SWB ME/6336/A/2, 4 February 1980.

[120] SWB ME/6342/i, 11 February 1980.

[121] SWB ME/6337/i, 5 February 1980.

Such behavior, like the Gafsa raid itself, was myopic and counterproductive. The United States immediately increased its military sales to Tunisia and renewed its efforts to establish military standby facilities there.[122] In late February Washington unveiled a military aid package of armored personnel carriers and helicopters worth $23 million (additional helicopters were furnished by France and Italy). By mid-1981 U.S. military credits to Tunisia had leapt to $95 million from a pre-Gafsa level of approximately $19 million per annum.[123] Furthermore, Congressional opposition to a bill authorizing military assistance to Morocco dissolved in Gafsa's wake.[124]

Yet Tripoli was anything but penitent. A string of border violations further fouled relations with Tunis. On July 27, 1980, a three-man Libyan patrol was arrested 12km inside Tunisian territory. On November 16, another three-man squad was surprised by a Tunisian patrol 3.5 km inside the border near Sidi Toui. The Tunisian Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Mestiri, expressed alarm at indications Libya was strengthening its air and ground forces at an airbase in Otaia (18 km from the border) and along the border itself. Mestiri pointedly warned the Libyan

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[122] Hechiche, 61-62.

[123] "US arms sales to Tunisia," Jamahiriya Review no. 23 (April, 1982), 12.

[124] Haley, 118.

charge d'affaires against further incursions.[125] Given Tunisia's relative military inferiority, direct U.S. or French intervention would have been required to give that warning teeth. That the Tunisian government contemplated inviting such intervention reflects the extent to which Qaddafi had utterly failed to reduce Western influence in the region while expanding his own powerbase.

The Tunisian interregnum neatly captures the irrational nature of Libyan national security policy. The Jerba proposal, albeit rash, was not without logic. But Qaddafi's refusal to accept anything less than full union, and the extremism with which he sought revenge against those who had thwarted his plan, transformed a potential ally into a suspicious and defensive neighbor. The Gafsa raid vividly exemplified Tripoli's myopia in resorting to subversion.

Ally Malta?

Winston Churchill once remarked that Malta is the only unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean, and it is precisely because of its command of a strategic Mediterranean choke point, as well as its proximity to the Libyan shoreline, that Malta is of strategic import to Tripoli. As seen in the preceding chapter, the overt imperative behind Libya's Maltese diplomacy was to deny the island to NATO by pushing non-alignment. The Libyans were far coyer with regards to their own interests;

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[125] SWB ME/6579/A/3, 19 November 1980.

Qaddafi rather improbably maintained that the notion of Libyan-Maltese union was incidentally raised in a conversation with Maltese Prime Minister Dom Mintoff.[126]

Prospects for a Libyan-Maltese alliance seemed propitious after the last British troops departed Malta in March 1979. Even before the British finished their withdrawal Libyan troops had reportedly taken control of key facilities on the island. In 1973 and again in 1978 Libya donated helicopters to the tiny island-state; the *quid pro quo* was permission to fly helicopter reconnaissance missions from the island.[127] However, the Maltese were disappointed when expected Libyan largesse failed to materialize. In June 1980 Qaddafi stopped supplying oil to Malta at a discounted rate. Relations were further clouded by an off-shore boundary dispute regarding the states' respective drilling rights on the Medina Bank. Four years earlier Qaddafi had agreed to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice, but he could not resist the temptation to settle the matter by force.

Shortly after Qaddafi's June visit, Libyan warships warned the Italian ENI oil platform, Saipem-II, that it was operating in an area of Libyan jurisdiction (60 miles southeast of Malta).[128] A Libyan submarine trained its deck gun on the rig, forcing it to cease operations. A

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[126] Mattar, 61.

[127] Bodansky, 90.

[128] SWB ME/6507/i, 27 August 1980.

Libyan frigate reportedly fired warning shots. Dom Mintoff responded by accusing Tripoli of behaving as Malta's 'worst enemy' and expelled 47 Libyan military 'advisers,' who had been using Valletta as a base for helicopter reconnaissance.[129] According to a former Maltese parliamentarian, this expulsion was unceremoniously conducted at gunpoint.[130] Two months later, Rome Radio reported that the Maltese Nationalist Front had attacked a Libyan naval vessel anchored at Genoa in retaliation for the August incident.[131]

Maltese terrorism was the least consequential result of Tripoli's heavy-handedness. Of greater significance was the emergence of a Maltese-Italian defence pact on 15 September 1980.[132] Henceforth Italy, not Libya, would be the guarantor of Maltese neutrality. The Italians had their own reasons for disturbing Qaddafi's peace of mind. In addition to the Saipem-II incident, Rome was angered by the recent seizure of two Italian trawlers off the Libyan coast.[133]

In November Qaddafi belatedly agreed (again) to submit the territorial dispute to the International Court

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[129] John Cooley, "Libya's heavy-handed policy nudges Malta toward the West," Christian Science Monitor, 19 September 1980.

[130] Author's interview with former Maltese MP Dennis Sammut, November 1994.

[131] SWB ME/6565/i, 3 November 1980.

[132] Wright, 214; Jonathan Bearman, Qadhafi's Libya, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986) 254.

[133] SWB ME/6492/A/1, 8 August 1980.

of Justice.[134] But his lack of diplomatic aplomb had already foiled yet another opportunity to establish a significant alliance.

Ally Niger?

Libya and Niger signed a number of accords between 1969 and 1973, culminating in a 'Defence and Security Treaty' signed by Qaddafi and President Diori Hamani in Niamey on March 23, 1974. The two states thereby undertook to defend each other in case of direct or indirect aggression and to furnish all necessary aid if the external or internal security of either state were threatened. The Libyans also promised to help develop and equip Niger's army.

The logic behind this unlikely alliance deserves some consideration. While Niger lagged behind Libya's North African neighbors in wealth, military power, and technological advancement, its strategic attractions were nevertheless alluring. These included uranium deposits at Arlit, abundant manpower (a high percentage of which was Muslim and therefore, in Qaddafi's eyes, amenable to his purposes), and even (via Nigeria or Benin) access to the Atlantic.

Alas, Niger's alliance with Libya lasted less than a month. On April 15, 1974, Diori was deposed by Lieutenant-Colonel Seyni Kountché (to the considerable relief of Algeria and France). Kountché criticized

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[134] SWB ME/6581/A/4, 21 November 1980.

Libya's occupation of the Aouzou Strip and opposed any expansion of Libyan influence in Niger. Predictably, Qaddafi tried to install a more malleable ruler through a coup d'etat on March 15, 1976.[135] The coup failed. Although Boumédiène helped the two leaders paper over their differences for a brief period, in October 1980 Qaddafi accused Niger of placing its Touareg minority in extermination camps. On January 13, 1981, Niamey broke diplomatic relations citing the subversive activities of resident Libyan diplomats, and Tripoli openly announced its support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Niger.[136] Yet another Libyan alliance had come and gone, leaving enmity in its wake.

Ally Sudan?

The volatility of Libyan-Sudanese relations was consistent with the pattern previously outlined. Prior to the 1973 War Libya, Egypt, and the Sudan formed a tripartite alliance. Thereafter, the deterioration of Libyan-Egyptian ties reframed Libyan strategic interests in the Sudan. At minimum Qaddafi hoped to split Khartoum away from Cairo. At best he hoped to forge an anti-Egyptian alliance. However, when conventional diplomacy was slow to yield results Qaddafi once again resorted to subversion. Thus, following a press barrage in March 1974 attacking Numeiri for supporting Sadat, a Libyan-

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[135] Blin, 365.

[136] Blin, 370.

backed coup attempt was launched in May.[137] By early 1975 there were intimations of a rapprochement, but behind the scenes Qaddafi was still engaged in subversion. Abel Alier, a Sudanese official, met the Colonel in April:

> Our meeting with the Libyan leader was most uneasy. At one point he seemed to want the South to go its own way from the rest of the Sudan, and at another he seemed to tell us not to obstruct coups in the offing as long as self-rule in the South was assured by the new government. He seemed torn between a frank conspiratorial talk and diplomatic restraint, being uncertain about his audience's support.[138]

As fate would have it, Qaddafi should have opted for restraint; upon returning to Khartoum, Alier warned Numeiri that Qaddafi was 'far from friendly' and 'might be planning to stab us in the back in spite of recent attempts to improve relations.'[139] This assessment proved accurate in July 1976. As in the Gafsa incident, Libya provided the logistical support for a minuscule invasion force which hoped to topple Numeiri (Deeb writes that Libya only supplied the Sudanese National Front with training and perhaps financial assistance, as if such assistance were less egregious!).[140] Thousands of

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[137] Deeb, 106; FBIS-MEA, 10 May 1974, I6.

[138] Abel Alier, Southern Sudan (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1990), 193.

[139] Alier, 193.

[140] Nasr Eldin El Hadi El Mahdi, Deputy Chairman of Sudan's Umma party, was among the invaders and unequivocally confirmed that he and his men acted with the full support of the Libyan armed forces. (Author's interview, March 13, 1996).

Egyptian troops were deployed to assist Numeiri in restoring order, and within days the Egyptians and Sudanese signed a mutual defence treaty. Qaddafi had once again sabotaged his own strategy.

Ally Uganda?

When Libya did extend military aid to foreign states that assistance proved to be of limited utility, a point brought into relief by Qaddafi's military adventurism in Uganda. Libyan support for the reviled Idi Amin regime began in September 1972 after fighting broke out between Uganda and Tanzania. Qaddafi despatched a number of C-130s to carry weapons and commandos to aid Amin's forces. The rationale for this policy was a dim notion that Uganda could be a useful ally in undermining the Numeiri government.[141]

Libyans soon replaced the Israeli advisers who had been training the Ugandan air force.[142] Libyan and PLO experts began advising Idi Amin's intelligence service, the notorious State Research Bureau; documents recovered afterwards indicated they taught Amin how to pit elements of his intelligence system against each other.[143] In 1973, Qaddafi paid for an order of 60 APCs and a squadron

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[141] El Saadany, 95.

[142] George Ivan Smith, Ghosts of Kampala, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 93.

[143] Smith, 117.

of 12 Mirage fighters for Uganda.[144]

In defiance of his own military advisers, in the winter of 1979 Qaddafi despatched Libyan forces to help the Ugandans quash a Tanzanian-backed rebellion.[145] By March between 1,000 and 3,000 troops of the Eagle Qaddafi Regiment had been airlifted to the country.[146] In a disastrous action, a Libyan tank squadron at Mpigi was captured by Tanzanian infantrymen who waded through a swamp at night and struck the Libyans from behind.[147] One witness who surveyed the wreckage wrote:

> Huge Russian tanks and personnel carriers were sprawled and overturned among the banana groves. The Libyans had manned them and set up a well-concealed ambush on the road, guns at the ready. The liberation forces had walked through the groves and plantations, rounded hills, and on foot from each side totally annihilated the large Libyan force; four hundred killed, no Tanzanian casualty. Libyan soldiers trained for desert warfare were not at ease in the rain forests, in the wet season.[148]

On the night of March 10, 1979, elements of the expeditionary force assigned to take Masaka clashed with the 201st Tanzanian brigade. After an indecisive skirmish in which many Tanzanians broke ranks and fled

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[144] Mahmood Mamdani, Imperialism and fascism in Uganda, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 69.

[145] Lisa Anderson, "Libya and American foreign policy," Middle East Journal 36 (Autumn 1982): 527.

[146] Alan Scott MacDougall, "Libya," in Fighting armies: Antagonists in the Middle East, ed. Richard Gabriel, 127-45, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 132; Smith 1980, 184; Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey, War in Uganda: The legacy of Idi Amin, (London: Zed Press, 1982), 90-91.

[147] Smith, 184-85.

[148] Smith, 8, as cited in Wright 1981, 212-13.

(terrified by Libyan use of Soviet BM-21 rocket launchers colloquially known as 'Stalin organs'), the 208th brigade did a forced march and arrived to attack the Libyan rear at dawn. The Tanzanians were in no mood to take prisoners: around 200 Libyans were killed but only one was captured.[149] Another thirty Libyans were killed by troops of the 201st brigade at a coffee farm near Mityana, West of Mpigi.[150] A Libyan TU-22 flew sorties out of Nakasongola airbase but did not provide effective air support.[151]

The final battle occurred on the morning of April 7, when the 208th attacked Entebbe. Just after 10:00 AM a Libyan C-130 attempted to evacuate thirty Libyan soldiers; it took an RPG round while taxiing down the runway, killing everyone inside.[152] Remnants of the Libyan force, unable to speak the language and unsure of where to go, were easily mopped up by the Tanzanians--often with the help of local citizens. A Libyan convoy escaping to Kampala was ambushed: over 65 Libyans died, bringing total casualties just at Entebbe to nearly 300. The Libyans also lost a great deal of material, including three Stalin organs.[153]

By the end of April approximately 500 Libyan

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[149] Avirgan and Honey, 90-91.

[150] Avirgan and Honey, 94.

[151] Avirgan and Honey, 120.

[152] ibid., 121.

[153] ibid., 122.

soldiers lay dead.[154] Some 59 Libyan prisoners were quickly released; whether Qaddafi paid a $20 million ransom to secure their freedom is disputed.[155] Libya's explanation for the fiasco was the same supplied during the 1977 clash with Egypt: the soldiers were from the Popular Militia, not the regular forces.[156] The Libyan-Ugandan alliance was not spoken of again.

In questions of diplomacy, unlike affairs of the heart, it may sometimes be better never to love at all than to love and lose. Qaddafi never seemed to grasp that each successive *volte-face* in bilateral relations eroded the credibility of Libya foreign policy. By 1980, his tempestuous quest for an ally had become a joke throughout the Arab world. Moreover, Libya had established an unenviable reputation for taking its international obligations cavalierly. In point of fact, Tripoli signed mutual defence treaties with Niger (9 March 1974), Guinea (27 November 1974), Algeria (28-29 December 1975), Gabon and Togo (5 January 1976). In addition, the Tripoli Declaration of December 5, 1977, which gave birth to the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front (a coalition of Arab states opposed to the Camp David accords), also included a defence provision.

Finally, in the midst of the Iran hostage crisis the

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[154] Assuming some exaggeration in the figures previously noted.

[155] Wright, 213; Avirgan and Honey, 122.

[156] Wright, 213.

Libyan leader announced that, 'The Jamahiriya considers any American or other military aggression against the Islamic Iranian Republic as aggression against the Jamahiriya itself.'[157] Yet in each instance these accords were not backed up by political commitment. The rhetoric of mutual defence was, in the end, only rhetoric.

Libya and the United States

This chapter has thus far demonstrated that Tripoli's attempts to remedy the Libyan security predicament were ineffective and even counterproductive. This was in part because Qaddafi conceived of Libyan security in such a way as to make its attainment difficult if not impossible for a state with Libya's limited resources to achieve. This was especially true of Qaddafi's determination to roll back or even eradicate American influence in the Middle East. Libya not only failed to reduce Washington's regional role but also aggravated its own security predicament by fostering American enmity.

By 1973, the U.S. State Department had concluded that attempting to befriend the Libyan regime was futile. Qaddafi deliberately spurned U.S. diplomats despite their gestures of goodwill. The State Department decided to ignore Qaddafi pending a change, for better or worse, in

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[157] SWB ME/6203/A/7, 28 November 1979; SWB ME/6337/A/9, 5 February 1980; SWB ME/6626/i, 19 January 1981.

his disposition.

Yet over the remainder of the decade the Libyans showed increasing hostility towards the United States. In speech after speech the Colonel singled out Washington as the enemy of Libya and the 'Arab nation.' His rhetorical attacks became ever shriller, culminating in a virtual declaration of war in 1980:

> The presence of American forces in Egypt, Somalia and Oman, even if at the request of the governments of these countries, is considered an invasion and an aggression against the Arab homeland that should be resisted. The Arab homeland is the home of all Arabs, and if the independence of any part of the Arab homeland is violated, the independence of the whole Arab homeland is violated . . . We must force America to leave the Arab homeland by force, and we must bring it to the state where, even if the agents asked it to establish military bases in the Arab homeland it would refuse to do so.[158]

Foremost of his voiced grievances was U.S. involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, specifically its support of Israel and its role in brokering peace between Egypt and Israel after the 1973 War. But any display of American power, such as formation of the army's Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), elicited sharp objections from Tripoli. Qaddafi warned that the RDF would be used not against the Soviets but against Arab forces. Libyan writers described scenarios (mostly fantastic, but occasionally plausible) under which the RDF would fight against Arab forces, such as a new oil embargo or another Arab-Israeli

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[158] SWB ME/6517/A/2, 8 September 1980.

war.[159] Less plausible were his fears that the RDF would be used to invade Libya.[160] The RDF exercised in the Egyptian western desert with the Persian Gulf, not Colonel Qaddafi, in mind.[161]

President Carter's decision to keep the U.S. Sixth Fleet out of the Gulf of Sirte reflected the administration's hands-off approach to Qaddafi--and its failure.[162] In August 1979, when American newspapers floated the notion that the navy would contest Libyan territorial claims to the Gulf of Sirte, Libya announced it would defend the Gulf by force.[163] Tripoli radio threatened to teach a humiliating lesson to the 'cobweb tiger.'[164]

Indeed, in March 1976 Libyan Mirages (possibly piloted by Pakistani pilots) had in fact attacked an American EC-130 flying a surveillance mission over the Mediterranean.[165] And on September 16, 1980, a USAF RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft was intercepted by two Libyan

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[159] "The modern face of colonial occupation," Jamahiriya Review no. 13 (April 1981), 15.

[160] SWB ME/6556/A/2, 23 October 1980.

[161] SWB ME/6576/A/3, 15 November 1980.

[162] Carter gave the order in September 1980; President Reagan promptly countermanded it. Between 1977 and 1981 the U.S. Navy conducted eight large exercises in the disputed area (Dennis R. Neutze, "The Gulf of Sidra incident: A legal perspective, " U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings vol. 108 (January 1982), 29.

[163] SWB/ME/6193/A/11, 14 August 1979.

[164] SWB ME/6194/i, 15 August 1979.

[165] Bodansky, 89.

MiG-23s 200 miles north of Libya. One MiG fired an air-to-air missile before the RC-135 escaped towards Athens. The USS John F. Kennedy was immediately deployed to the area. On September 21, eight Libyan fighters (four Mirages, two MiG-23s, and two Mig-25s) intercepted another RC-135 in international airspace. The appearance of the RC-135's escort--carrier based F-14s--dissuaded the Libyans from attempting hostilities.[166]

Two years after leaving office, President Carter revealed yet another grave Libyan provocation: a plot to assassinate Hermann Eilts, the U.S. ambassador to Egypt. When U.S. intelligence circles got wind of the plan Carter sent a stern personal note to Qaddafi, threatening punitive action. Where disengagement had failed a timely and unambiguous threat worked, and Qaddafi cancelled the operation.[167]

When it became clear that Libya was using its resources to support Palestinian terrorism, Congress forbade the sale of U.S. weaponry to Tripoli. This ban prevented Libya from taking delivery of eight C-130s and two Boeing 727s which it had already paid for, yet Boeing refused to refund the money. The impasse became a sore

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[166] William Safire, "Qadhafi's shrewd gambit to entice Soviet protection," International Herald Tribune, August 1981; cf. Bodansky, 90.

[167] President Carter's recollection of the affair was confirmed by Zbigniew Brzezinski. "When Carter got tough," Sunday Times, 7 March 1982.

point with Libyan officials.[168] Yet the regime was unmoved by any gesture of goodwill. For example, after the State Department persuaded Congress to release several planes on the condition they not be used for military purposes. The LAF immediately put the jets into service ferrying his expeditionary force to Uganda. Such brazen flouting of diplomatic convention contributed to the growing consensus that the U.S. could not and should not attempt to do business with Tripoli.

Libya's quest to dislodge the remaining C-130s was handled in an extremely short-sighted fashion. Tripoli cultivated Billy Carter, the President's colorful beer-brewing brother, as an agent of influence. He was fêted in grand style in Tripoli, given the generous sum of $200,000--belatedly described as a loan--and asked to prevail upon the White House to unlock the C-130 deal. Billy narrowly escaped prosecution and was forced by the Justice Department to register as a representative of the Libyan government.

Nonetheless, news of the gross conflict of interests became a political scandal ('Billygate') which humiliated the incumbent administration immediately before the presidential election of 1980. As Carter recalls in his memoirs: 'The Libyan mess, which was dominating the news, was wreaking havoc with our efforts to deal with anything

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[168] Richard Parker, North Africa: Regional tensions and strategic concerns, (New York: Praeger, 1987), 68.

else . . .'[169] Only three months before the election Carter was forced to dedicate a one hour news conference almost exclusively to the question of Libya. The beleaguered Carter campaign already had enough troubles; while Libya's baksheesh-diplomacy was not the only wave Ronald Reagan rode into the White House, Qaddafi had done his bit in creating a far different administration.

Libyan national security policy set out to reduce American influence in the Middle East, but had the antithetical result of strengthening American ties to Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan. Moreover, the vehemence of its anti-American rhetoric and diplomacy, to say nothing of its unprovoked attacks on American aircraft, established Libya as an adversary and thus set the stage for future conflict. Deliberately antagonizing a superpower produced few--if any--tangible benefits; it did, however, indubitably aggravate the Libyan security predicament.

Conclusion

The 1973 War revamped the Libyan external security predicament. With Nasser deceased, how should Qaddafi pursue security? Was non-alignment still feasible? Was confronting Israel and its allies a viable option?

Feasible or not, Qaddafi stuck to his guns. The course of Egyptian-Israeli relations perhaps made it easier to depict himself as the guardian of Nasser's

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[169] Carter, 548.

flame, and Qaddafi did all in his power to discredit the Egyptian president. When he failed to shame Sadat into shifting course, Qaddafi resorted to subversion in hopes of either coercing a reversal of Egyptian policy or deposing his Egyptian counterpart. Libya failed to accomplish either objective, yet managed to plunge its relations with Cairo into crisis and, briefly, into war.

With Egypt unwilling (and in Qaddafi's eyes, unworthy) to bear the standard of Arab resurgence, the Libyan leader stepped boldly into the gap. The militarization of Libyan society begun in 1969 picked up speed as Qaddafi sought to transform his country into a formidable military power. Exorbitant sums were poured into the military coffers. But becoming a significant military power was never a viable option given the state's demographic constraints. Indeed, the armed forces could not absorb much of their new weaponry.[170] In 1979 Libya had 160 operational aircraft and only 150 pilots.[171] Militarization was thus, at best, indecisive in remedying the security dilemma; at worst, it simply ignited a self-defeating arms race with Egypt.

Qaddafi also sought out new allies to join him in the task of reordering the Near East. The USSR, now Libya's chief arms supplier, was a natural candidate, but

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[170] Sadat said of Libya's arsenal: 'we know it (the LAF) isn't capable of that (using the weapons) because we trained it.' Flora Lewis, "Soviet navy loses right to use Egyptian ports," New York Times, 5 April 1976.

[171] Newsweek, 9 July 1979.

Qaddafi refused to relinquish the degree of autonomy which Moscow required before undertaking a commitment to Libya's security. Elsewhere, Qaddafi showed remarkable consistency in alienating the very states which might have ameliorated his strategic position. A simple pattern governed the life-cycle of Libya's alliances. Qaddafi's overtures generally met with cautious tolerance at first, but as the Libyan leader spelled out the terms of 'unity' he inevitably encountered resistance. Once spurned, Tripoli dropped the pretense of amity and adopted a hostile policy marked by shrill public criticism and violent subversion, thereby alienating neighbors which might otherwise have been important allies.

This pattern was played out with Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Malta, Niger and Sudan. Repeated failure cannot merely be ascribed to the vicissitudes of fate (nor can serious students of international relations blame it upon clandestine imperialist machinations). To be sure, Tripoli had to contend with difficult allies. Sadat's behavior at times missed the mark of exemplary statesmanship. But friction is inherent in international relations; successful statesmanship overcomes this friction through accommodation, persuasion, patience, and flexibility. Qaddafi, on the other hand, answered perceived slight with subversion, and in so doing failed to maintain a single credible strategic bilateral alliance.

In light of Libya's relative vulnerability, prudence suggested that Tripoli avoid antagonizing larger powers. Yet Qaddafi refused to recognize this fact, and since he was unfettered by domestic constraints there was no need for him to be. He deliberately antagonized the United States and even attacked its aircraft to press home his claim to the Gulf of Sirte. By the end of the decade the Libyan leader's extremism had begun to catch up to him, discrediting his sympathizers and leading to a hardening of American attitudes.

Were these policies, as Deeb contends, rational? No matter how bitter he found Sadat's pragmatic approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, neither the cease-fire after the 1973 War nor Camp David posed a clear threat to what Deeb argues were Libya's 'core foreign policy objectives in North Africa' (protecting the regime from foreign-backed coup attempts and defending Libya's territorial integrity).[172] Thus, even if one accepts Deeb's contention that Qaddafi's exclusion from the 1973 War left the Libyan leader sidelined and bereft of legitimacy, he was not the only Arab leader who Sadat failed to consult, and there is no evidence that Qaddafi's hold on power was ever in serious jeopardy as a result of his supposed isolation. Hence, her thesis fails to convincingly explain the course of Libyan-Egyptian relations.[173]

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[172] Deeb, 15.

[173] ibid., 91.

Moreover, the Gafsa episode elegantly debunks Deeb's argument that Libya's strategy was reducible to balance of power considerations (i.e., playing the Maghreb off the Mashreq). By this reasoning, Qaddafi's simmering dispute with Cairo should have induced him to nurture Tunis as an ally. Instead, Qaddafi cavalierly earned Tunisian enmity, ignoring the classic dictum against fighting on two fronts. The realpolitik model thus fails to convincingly explain Qaddafi's behavior; Deeb herself concedes bemusement.[174]

But the Gafsa raid, like the pattern of failed alliances it symbolized, is made comprehensible by approaching Libyan behavior from the standpoint of its leader's world view. Measured against his own objectives, Qaddafi's behavior was self-defeating and thus irrational. Indeed, the counterproductive consequences of his policies would become even clearer in the ensuing eight years that marked the Presidency of Ronald Reagan.

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[174] ibid., 128.

Chapter 3

Libya during the Reagan years, 1981-1988

The natural person has freedom to express himself even if, when he is mad, he behaves irrationally to express his madness.

-- *Muammar El Qaddafi, The Green Book*

Nothing during the first two decades of Muammar El Qaddafi's tenure so upset the Libyan national security equation as did the ascension of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency of the United States. Early in his first term, America's new chief executive (perhaps overestimating the threat Tripoli posed to the United States) became fixated on the Libyan leader, a fixation which colored U.S. policy towards Libya throughout his presidency. Reagan's hostility presented a challenge unlike any the Colonel had hitherto faced. Qaddafi was accustomed to being indulged or ignored by Washington, and the emergence of an openly antagonistic superpower was a rude departure from this experience. The Reagan years thus became a severe test of Qaddafi's ability to adapt his national security policy to a fluid international environment without sacrificing his political objectives.

The Libyan leader did not fare particularly well in this test. His agenda remained essentially unchanged, though the United States displaced Egypt as his strategic

preoccupation. Reducing America's regional influence--especially its military presence--had always been an element of Qaddafi's strategy, and it now took on a new prominence. However, his tactics (i.e., threatening America's regional partners) tended to have the opposite effect of increasing Washington's leverage. Qaddafi also sought to negate the American threat by drawing closer to the Soviet Union, yet failed to obtain any security assurances.

Under the circumstances, Libya might have been expected to pursue a temperate, even conciliatory, foreign policy. Instead, the regime's behavior became more extreme than ever. In the space of only a few years, Libya initiated attacks on Sudan, Tunisia, Italy and Chad, and sponsored subversion in myriad states. Furthermore, Tripoli's liquidation campaign against Libyan dissidents overseas stained the regime with the indelible ink of terrorism.

Most memorably, Qaddafi engaged the United States in a series of melodramatic skirmishes in which his own forces were severely disadvantaged. When, predictably, the United States won these encounters, the Colonel's determination to get the better of the White House made him quick to approve ill-conceived covert operations which invited further punitive responses. In so doing, he consistently ignored the long-term ramifications of

his behavior.[1] For Qaddafi, the road to disaster was paved with moral victories.

On a collision course with the White House

As seen in Chapter 2, Tripoli's clumsy attempts to use Billy Carter as an agent of influence in Washington rebounded by helping to usher in the 'Reagan revolution.' Relations with the new Republican administration began on a foreboding note. Upon presenting his credentials, Libya's ranking diplomat (who, technically speaking, was no longer an ambassador since Qaddafi had revamped the Foreign Ministry and transformed its embassies into People's Bureaux), expressed his hope that the two countries would be able to resolve their differences amicably. Reagan's alleged reply was vaguely menacing: 'We'll resolve them--one way or the other.'[2] Secretary of State Alexander Haig elaborated the get-tough-on-Libya message during his Senate confirmation hearings.

This inauspicious beginning reflected Reagan's simplistic approach to international affairs. As his memoirs demonstrate, the former Governor of California had an inaccurate and even caricaturish understanding of Qaddafi:

> Qaddafi was a madman . . . Through terrorism,

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[1] As Lisa Anderson notes, the short run was always the run that mattered most to the Colonel. Lisa Anderson, "Qadhdhafi and the Kremlin," Problems of communism 34 (September-October 1985): 43.

[2] Author's interview with former Maltese MP Dennis Sammut, November 1994.

> he was trying to unify the world of Islam into a single nation of fundamentalists under rigid religious control--a theocracy, like Iran . . . He was seeking to accomplish his goal using Libya's oil wealth, Russian weapons, and terrorism. Like the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian despot with whom he was allied and often in contact, Qaddafi was an unpredictable fanatic. He believed any act, no matter how vicious or cold-blooded, was justified to further his goals.[3]

In Reagan's eyes, Qaddafi represented an amalgam of the worst threats then facing the United States: communism, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism.

Reagan's evident disdain for the Libyan leader was reciprocated in Tripoli. The conservative Republican personified the Libyan regime's worst nightmare of militant American 'imperialism.'[4] For Qaddafi personally, Reagan perhaps represented much more. Here, incarnate, was the Colonel's most cherished dream: the leader of a Great Power, confidently brandishing the power of his office. In contrast, Qaddafi was still the leader of a minor power, incapable of fulfilling his sense of destiny. This *aperçu* helps explain the extraordinary derision which Tripoli directed at the White House. Qaddafi jeered the president for having been an actor, and labelled Reagan a 'trivial midget,' an 'ignorant' man with 'no understanding of the world,

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[3] Ronald Reagan, An American life: The autobiography of Ronald Reagan, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 280-81.

[4] "A strategy for the Mediterranean," Jamahiriya Review no. 8, (January 1981): 14.

politics, and Libya.'[5] Mocking the American's cowboy image, the Colonel predicted that Reagan would impudently plunge the globe into a Third World War. Moreover, his first diplomatic note to Reagan was decidedly undiplomatic. Qaddafi pointedly neglected to congratulate Reagan on his election and berated the president for his government's treatment of Native Americans, the majority of whom (Qaddafi claimed) were of Libyan descent.[6]

Precisely because the U.S.-Libyan conflict was so personalized, its broader strategic import has been obscured to many observers. For some the conflict was reducible to a clash of personalities or to a study in brinkmanship.[7] Others saw Qaddafi either as a victim or as a wily survivor of foreign aggression. Deeb, for example, posits that the Colonel's policies throughout this period were rational because the advent of the Reagan administration produced 'panic' in Tripoli.[8] Once again, this species of argument misses the point that a leader's rationality is most convincingly demonstrated by his ability to formulate and sustain policies that

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[5] SWB ME/6961/A/1, 23 February 1982; SWB ME/6977/A/5, 13 March 1982.

[6] SWB ME/6634 A/15, 28 January 1981.

[7] The latter approach is slyly denoted in the title of James Kennon Moore's thesis, "Walking the line of death: US-Libyan relations in the Reagan decade, 1981-1989," (San Jose State University, 1991).

[8] Mary-Jane Deeb, Libya's foreign policy in North Africa (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 143.

advance his interests, not by referene to his state of mind.

Qaddafi was not alone in objecting to the style and substance of America's new chief executive. But unlike other foreign leaders, he consistently misread Reagan in two ways. First, he grievously underestimated Reagan's willingness to use the power of the American Presidency. Second, he grossly misjudged Reagan's appeal to the American people, and hence his ability to overcome the 'Vietnam syndrome' which had hamstrung American diplomacy during most of the Colonel's tenure. In fact, Qaddafi was unfailingly astonished to hear that Reagan--the 'monster,' the 'bully'--was immensely popular at home.[9]

This erroneous analysis undoubtedly played a role in Qaddafi's decision to accentuate his differences with the White House at the time of Reagan's inauguration. Qaddafi reaffirmed Libya's enmity towards the United States and pledged to lead the Arab nation in attacking U.S. interests.[10] Specifically, Qaddafi threatened to attack U.S. forces based in Berbera, Somalia, unless they were withdrawn.[11] In March, Libya's Revolutionary Committees (Qaddafi's most fervent disciples) announced they would lead the 'strategic counterattack' against U.S. bases and, lest there be any dissenters, liquidate

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[9] Judith Miller, God has ninety-nine names, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 223-224.

[10] SWB ME/6629 A/3-4, 22 January 1981.

[11] ibid.

Libyan dissidents.

After years of such inflammatory rhetoric, Libya's threats had lost much of their shock value. Tripoli therefore decided to throw down a gauntlet in America's backyard. When Reagan attempted to pressure Nicaragua's communist government by withholding $75 million in aid, Libya promptly extended $100 million to the Sandinista regime.[12] Nicaragua, hitherto a non-entity in Libyan foreign policy, was suddenly hailed by Qaddafi as 'the ally on whom one can rely.'[13] The Jamahiriya began furnishing military aid to Managua as well. In April 1983, a Libyan plane supposedly delivering medical supplies to Nicaragua was searched in Brazil and discovered to be laden with arms. Over the course of the next eight years Tripoli funnelled aid to leftists in Grenada (where Libya financed construction of the controversial airstrip--designed to accommodate Soviet military aircraft--that prompted the U.S. invasion), El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela and several Caribbean micro-states, and periodically reaffirmed its support of America's favorite bogeymen (Nicaragua, Cuba, North Korea, and Iran).[14]

Apart from its nuisance value, this burst of Latin American activism was part of a halting courtship pattern

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[12] Georgie Anne Geyer Washington Star, 5 May 1981; see also John Cooley, Libyan Sandstorm (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 227.

[13] SWB ME/6687/A/2, 31 March 1981.

[14] e.g., SWB ME/7295/A/1-2, 30 March 1983.

which Qaddafi danced around the Soviet bear. In April 1981, only a few months after Reagan's inauguration, the Colonel paid his first visit to the Soviet capital since December 1976. There he publicly endorsed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and joined his hosts in denouncing the U.S. presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.[15] As intended, Qaddafi's trip caused considerable agitation in Western capitals as analysts wondered if Libya would attempt to join the Warsaw Pact.

But the Libyan leader once again demonstrated that he was his own worst enemy. Greeted at the airport by Brezhnev himself, the Colonel quickly forgot his place. He mortified the Soviets by demanding to pray in Moscow's Grand Mosque (which had been closed for years). And he stepped roughshod on timeless Soviet fears of a revival of Muslim sensibilities in the Central Asian republics by requesting permission to establish consulates there. Brezhnev drily observed that 'there are certain differences of an ideological order between us.'[16]

The cash-hungry USSR nevertheless agreed to show the flag in and around Libya and to supply what was a staggering amount of weaponry for a Third World state.

The growth in LAF naval power was particularly dramatic.

The fleet received a submarine and two minesweepers in

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[15] SWB SU/6712/A4/2-3, 1 May 1981.

[16] Anderson, 38; Current digest of the Soviet press, (27 May 1981), 10.

May, two missile boats in June and a third in December.[17] In July 1981 two Soviet frigates paid the first ever official Soviet naval call. In another bilateral watershed which caused great concern to NATO, a Soviet Backfire bomber landed at a Libyan airbase, refueled, and returned to the Soviet Union.[18] In September 1981 the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London reported the delivery of a dozen SS-12 Scaleboard missiles which sparked even greater alarm until the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency opined Libya had in fact only received an associated radar system.[19]

Nevertheless, Qaddafi's trip to Moscow was notable primarily for what it did not produce--namely, a Soviet commitment to defend Libya if attacked. The reasons for this were three-fold. First, Qaddafi misread the Soviets almost as badly as he misread the Reagan White House. He demonstrated little appreciation of Soviet interests or of Soviet decision-makers and their aversion to unnecessary risks--above all, the risk of war with NATO.[20] The Soviets perceived Qaddafi as erratic and therefore dangerous. As one official put it: 'one should

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[17] "Libyan navy gets evacuation day boost," Jamahiriya Review, no. 12 (May 1981): 7; "Missile craft add strength to Libyan navy," Jamahiriya Review, no. 15 (August 1981): 7; "New missile boat," Jamahiriya Review, no. 19 (December 1981): 19.

[18] Benjamin F. Schemmer, "The U.S. has lost a lot of years," Armed Forces Journal International (September 1981): 50-51.

[19] Cooley, 241.

[20] Dennis Ross, "Soviet Decisionmaking for the Middle East," in Security in the Middle East, ed. Samuel F. Wells Jr. and Mark A Bruzonsky, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 237-239.

not forget that Colonel Qaddafi is a Muslim fanatic, with all that implies.'[21] Qaddafi reinforced Moscow's misgivings by misrepresenting Soviet-Libyan relations whenever it suited him. For example, in July he boasted to *Newsweek*: 'if we are involved in a war the Soviet Union will fight on our side.'[22] Such statements surely raised unamused eyebrows in the Kremlin.

Second, a subtle but immutable conflict of interests mitigated against a tighter Soviet-Libyan strategic partnership. Qaddafi's support of Idi Amin in 1979, for example, put him at odds with Soviet purposes, as did his occasionally sharp criticism of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and perhaps even his support of the Polisario. More importantly, Qaddafi's behavior had the potential to precipitate a regional conflagration that might ultimately increase American influence in the Near East. Libya could ill-afford such conflicts of interest with its prospective patron, since it needed the USSR far more than Moscow needed Tripoli, as Qaddafi admitted in his annual September 1st address: 'We desperately need to be in military alliance with any ally who will stand by us against the United States.'[23] This, of course, is precisely what Moscow was not eager to do. Tripoli's

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[21] Christian Science Monitor, 16 October 1981.

[22] "Kaddafi's dangerous game," Newsweek (20 July 1981): 46.

[23] As quoted in Ellen Laipson, "Libya and the Soviet Union: Alliance at arm's length," in The pattern of Soviet conduct in the Third World, ed. Walter Laqueur, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 136.

strategic import was marginal when compared to the importance of nurturing stable relations with the United States. And in the early 1980s, Soviet foreign policy took as one of its main missions the task of preventing the escalation of Third World conflicts into confrontations with the United States.[24] Qaddafi was a ready-made casualty of *détente*.

Thus, when Brezhnev proposed a new 'code of conduct' for the superpowers to observe in the Third World (a proposal aimed to dissuade the U.S. from defining regions like the Persian Gulf as vital national interests), a wary Qaddafi skirted endorsing the plan by requesting 'more details of the ways to neutralise the Arabian Gulf and keep it out of international conflict.'[25] His reticence was understandable. By implication, the Soviets were hinting they would also forego areas--perhaps including North Africa--as vital interests. What applied to regions might reasonably apply to client states, and indeed it was not long before the Soviets, disillusioned by Afghanistan, openly questioned the wisdom of 'unilateral military intervention in the Third World in support of client regimes.'[26]

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[24] Roy Allison and Phil Williams, "Superpower competition and crisis prevention," in Superpower competition and crisis prevention in the Third World, ed. Roy Allison and Phil Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16.

[25] As quoted in Roy Allison, The Soviet Union and the strategy of non-alignment in the Third World, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1988), 154.

[26] Allison and Wiliams, 19.

Finally, Tripoli still balked at the Kremlin's *quid pro quo*, the establishment of Soviet bases on Libyan soil. Qaddafi declared his resistance 'to any attempt to reduce or cancel out its (Libya's) international role by imposing a situation which might oblige it to relinquish neutrality in compelling circumstances.'[27]

For a White House that viewed the USSR as an 'evil empire,' Libya's association with Moscow was further evidence of perfidy. Secretary Haig called Libya a Soviet proxy; Francis J. West, Assistant Secretary of Defense, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

> Libya has been transformed, in effect, into a Soviet weapons depot and is able to promise and deliver Soviet-origin weapons to states and factions friendly to the Soviets and inimical to our interests.[28]

Although the Libyan regime had undoubtedly anticipated some political fallout from the Moscow summit, it was taken aback by the next development. In early May the White House--convinced that Libya's policies posed a danger to the United States--announced it was severing relations, and gave Libya five days to close its embassy and recall its diplomats.[29]

This was a serious setback for Tripoli, which could

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[27] Allison, 203-204.

[28] As quoted in Mohamed El Khawas, Qaddafi: His ideology in theory and practice (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1986), 151-152.

[29] The break in relations was due not only to Qaddafi's perceived role as a Soviet surrogate, but also to a host of complaints about Libyan behavior, including its invasion of Chad and its attacks on Libyan dissidents residing in the United States.

either accept the U.S. action with equanimity or hurl invective at America. For Qaddafi, it was an easy choice:

> To hell with America . . . In the face of what the United State has done to us, today, in front of the Palestine Resistance, we declare that we will arm and finance the Palestine Resistance with all our potential.[30]

Libyan radio warned that this was a prelude to an American invasion, a theme picked up by the Libyan Foreign Ministry.[31] The *Jamahiriya Review* published what it claimed was the U.S. plan of attack, which called for Libyan exiles and mercenaries to create political turmoil as a pretext for U.S. forces to restore stability.[32]

Egypt featured prominently in these conspiracy theories. After Egyptian Defence Minister Ahmed Badawi and members of his staff died in a plane crash, Libyan newspapers accused Sadat of engineering the accident to facilitate an invasion.[33] Similarly, when in March 1981 the Israeli Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon, was given a

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[30] SWB ME/6725/A/12, 16 May 1981.

[31] SWB ME/6720/A/1, 11 May 1981; "Campaign 'paves way to direct aggression,'" Guardian, 20 August 1981.

[32] Jamahiriya Review no. 13, (April 1981): 14; Phil Kelly, "Blueprint for the US invasion of Libya," Jamahiriya Review no. 14, (July 1981): 13. See Claudia Wright, New Statesman (April 1981). Some years later Wright suggested: 'Reagan administration officials hate, detest, spit blood towards Arabs. . . . who are the officials who hold these views? The senior ranks of the State Department, the Pentagon, the CIA, and the National Security Council' (Jonathan Bearman, Qadhafi's Libya [London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986], x). This would seem to fall somewhat short of objectivity.

[33] "How did Badawi die?," Jamahiriya Review no. 13, (April 1981): 14.

helicopter tour of military sites in Egypt's western desert, Libya's state-controlled media predicted a joint Israeli-Egyptian assault. Israeli F-16s painted with Egyptian markings would supposedly lead the air war while Egyptian ground forces would push across the border from Siwa before occupying the Brega oil fields and al-Jaghbub.[34]

The Libyan government vigorously denounced these alleged plots, although it may not have fully believed any of them. Aside from its brief border war with Egypt in 1977, Libya had never engaged in combat with a competent foe. One may assume that Tripoli regarded the prospect of American military action with considerable disbelief since the conventional wisdom at the time maintained that America was still hobbled by the memory of Vietnam. To a large extent this conventional wisdom was true. However, unbeknownst to Tripoli, Reagan and his aides had decided to change the conventional wisdom. As Reagan later recalled, he wanted to send a message to the world that: 'there was new management in the White House, and that the United States wasn't going to hesitate any longer to act when its legitimate interests were at stake.'[35]

Freedom of navigation was one such American interest, and the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Caspar

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[34] "Plan for invasion of Libya unmasked", Jamahiriya Review no. 15, (August 1981): 9-10; Newsweek, (15 June 1981).

[35] Reagan, 291.

Weinberger, pointed out to the President that the Carter Administration had backed away from challenging Libya's claim to the Gulf of Sirte (Carter suspended naval operations there, apparently in hopes that Libya would help to free the American hostages in Iran). Weinberger feared, and the President agreed, that continuance of this policy would lend credence to Libya's claim and encourage similar behavior.[36] In February 1981 the Reagan administration formally reversed President Carter's order and began planning naval maneuvers in the Gulf of Sirte.[37] In August, a carrier battle group of the U.S. Sixth Fleet commenced missile exercises in the disputed waters.

Exercises in a disputed region were bound to be controversial; these were calculated to be deliberately provocative. In Weinberger's words:

> Qaddafi now had to decide whether to take active measures to try to deny us our right to exercise . . . or be recognized internationally for what he actually was--and empty braggart easily able to make threats, but able to do little more than indulge in an overflow of rhetoric.[38]

The White House made no effort to conceal its preparations for a fight; to the contrary, America's public diplomacy aimed to goad Qaddafi into action. Pre-

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[36] Caspar Weinberger, Fighting for peace: Seven critical years in the Pentagon, (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 176.

[37] "Carter kept jets away," International Herald Tribune, 23 August 1981; see also Harold Jackson, "Reagan gave order as challenge to Libya," The Guardian 22 August 1981.

[38] Reagan, 282; Weinberger, 176-177.

exercise publicity went well beyond the norms required for notifying local sailors and airmen.[39] One U.S. editorialist noted it was an 'open secret' that 'the Reagan administration was looking for ways to get Colonel Qaddafi, who was being widely referred to by officials as "the most dangerous man in the world."'[40] To further rattle Tripoli, the Egyptian army simultaneously began exercises along the Libyan border.[41] Moreover, U.S. fliers roamed beyond their fleet's exclusion zone to within 25 miles of the Libyan coast.[42] This was outside of Libya's internationally recognized airspace (though it is not improbable that the American planes intruded there as well) but well within the expanded zone claimed by Tripoli. The United States was dangling the bait right under Qaddafi's nose.

The White House was confident he would bite. A National Intelligence Estimate entitled 'Libya: Aims and vulnerabilities,' which circulated while the exercise was being planned, stated that the Libyan military had 'standing orders to attack U.S. ships or aircraft' operating in the gulf. The likelihood of a violent

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[39] Official text of Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger's news conference, 19 August 1981 (International Communications Agency, U.S. Embassy London, 20 August 1981).

[40] International Herald Tribune, 21 August 1981.

[41] Official text of Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger's press conference, 19 August 1981 (International Communication Agency. U.S. Embassy London, 20 August 1981).

[42] Alan Cowell, "Libya jets downed just outside maneuver's area, 6th Fleet says," International Herald Tribune, 25 August 1981.

incident off the coast was therefore rated as 'relatively high.'[43] In the event of hostilities, Reagan authorized the Sixth Fleet to pursue enemy planes 'all the way into the hangar.'[44]

On the night of August 18, 1981, a pair of F-14s from the U.S.S. Nimitz intercepted two inbound Libyan Su-22s approximately 60 km north of the Libyan coast (slightly south of the Sixth Fleet's exclusion zone, but well within international airspace). The lead Su-22 fired a missile at the Americans as his companion maneuvered into an attack position. The F-14s evaded the missile and shot down both Libyan fighters, whose pilots ejected and were later recovered by Libyan search and rescue teams. In the White House the atmosphere was one of undisguised satisfaction.

Did Reagan's provocations obviate Qaddafi's responsibility for joining battle? Certainly not. Qaddafi was baited, to be sure, but he took the bait. And it was he who, in 1973, set himself up for just such an encounter by drawing a line in the water and pledging to destroy those ships and aircraft inclined to cross it. Since then Libya had repeatedly threatened, and on a few occasions actually resorted to, violence to assert its control over the Gulf. In making these observations, our

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[43] Bob Woodward, Veil: The secret wars of the CIA 1981-1987, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 94. Whether this assessment was based on hard intelligence or Qaddafi's dogmatic threats is unclear.

[44] Reagan, 289.

purpose is not to cast moral or legal aspersions on Libyan policy or its chief architect. Rather, affirming Qaddafi's responsibility for this encounter is a prerequisite for reaching conclusions about the efficacy of the policies which engendered it. In this instance, making claims and threats Libya could not enforce seems to have decisively detracted from rather than enhanced the state's security.

Some might argue that the Colonel's decision was mandated by Arab strategic culture (i.e., he had no option but to fight or lose face). Assuming that such a cultural imperative was operative, Qaddafi still bore the onus of having boxed himself into a corner from which violence was the only escape. Others might question whether Qaddafi personally authorized the engagement. His absence (he was in Yemen at the time), and the fact that the Su-22 was not the optimal aircraft for engaging an F-14, have been construed to support this hypothesis.[45]

However, a preponderance of the available evidence indicates that the attack was both deliberate and fully authorized. It strains credulity to believe that any Libyan officer, schooled in a system which discouraged initiative, would dare to engage U.S. aircraft without authorization from the highest levels. Libya was on full military alert for the duration of the Sixth Fleet's

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[45] "Libya pilots acted on their own," Guardian, 21 August 1981.

maneuvers and, according to Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, a classified transcript of the communications between the Libyan jets and ground control confirmed the attack was sanctioned.[46] Most tellingly, Libyan pilots played a dangerous game of chicken with American aviators: F-14s on combat air patrol intercepted and warned off no less than 44 Libyan aircraft, including MiG-23s, MiG-25s, and Mirage fighters prior to the dogfight.[47] By buzzing the Sixth Fleet so many times without opening fire, the Libyans probably hoped to lull the U.S. aviators into dropping their guard.

In trying to piece together the strategic rationale behind this encounter, some commentators have endowed the Libyans with elaborate motives: to rally the Arab states, to serve as a pretext for raising oil prices, or to justify a security pact with Ethiopia and South Yemen.[48] Whether the Libyan leadership foresaw the coming battle in such complex terms is doubtful. It seems more likely that precisely because the odds were so unfavorable Qaddafi saw a single air battle as a no-lose proposition. Should his pilots manage to damage or destroy even a single American aircraft, they would have performed

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[46] "US and Libya blame each other for air battle," Times, 20 August 1981; "Haig suggests downed Libyan jets were sent on a 'Targeted mission,'" International Herald Tribune, 24 August 1981.

[47] Alan Cowell, "Libya jets downed just outside maneuver's area, 6th Fleet says," International Herald Tribune, 25 August 1981.

[48] Robert Freedman, Soviet policy toward the Middle East since 1970, (New York: Praeger, 1982), 411.

beyond anyone's expectations. Should they fail, the loss of two planes was a small sacrifice to lay upon the altar of Arab honor, and Libya would reap sympathy and acclaim for confronting a much larger foe. Even a military defeat could be portrayed as a victory in a culture where notions of honor substituted for evidence of power.[49] Qaddafi gambled that the U.S. response would be proportional and therefore limited.

If this were his reasoning, it proved somewhat correct. The dogfight elicited an effusion of Arab nationalist sentiment. President Assad pledged to send a 5000-man tank division to strengthen Libyan defenses along the Egyptian border.[50] An airlift (reportedly operated with the aid of mercenary American pilots) began in mid-October, and two Syrian armored brigades were in fact transferred for a period.[51] Sympathy from Europe, though comparatively subdued, was nevertheless evident. Even the *Economist* questioned whether the 'mean little' incident was beneath the dignity of a superpower.

Yet much of the support given Libya was superficial. Many states, particularly in Europe, were quietly pleased to see Tripoli receive its comeuppance. Moreover,

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[49] See, for example, Adam Garfinkle, "An observation on Arab culture and deterrence: Metaphors and misgivings," in Regional security regimes: Israel and its neighbors, ed. Efraim Inbar, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 204-206.

[50] "Syrian force," Guardian, 31 August 1981.

[51] "Syria/Libya: US pilots in airlift?," Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily, 27 October 1981; see also SWB ME/6862/A/4, 24 October 1981.

Qaddafi himself soon erased any residual sympathy. On September 1, Qaddafi threatened to meet further 'violations' of the Gulf with attacks on NATO bases. European governments erupted in protest. The Libyan ambassador to Italy hastily claimed that Qaddafi had been misquoted--but the Colonel never retracted his statement.

The benefits of engaging the Sixth Fleet looked all the more ephemeral when measured against the immutable damage done to Libya's relations with the United States. The State Department promptly instructed U.S. citizens living in Libya to return home. A few weeks later, America was terrified by unsubstantiated reports of a Libyan hit-team allegedly inserted across the Canadian border with orders to assassinate President Reagan and other ranking government officials. After days of anti-terrorist fervor no evidence of a hit-team was found; an embarrassed Reagan administration confessed it had overreacted to intelligence which was apparently inaccurate.[52]

Libya's desire to retaliate was no idle fiction. Qaddafi's values were such that he felt compelled to avenge his military defeat. Nevertheless, he wished to minimize the risk of further retribution. He therefore authorized several terrorist actions against the United

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[52] Although the U.S. took a great deal of flack for the false alarm, the initial reports seemed compelling. A CIA source reported that during an August 22 meeting in Ethiopia, Qaddafi announced he was planning to have Reagan killed. Shortly thereafter, the National Security Agency reportedly intercepted a similar declaration by Qaddafi (Woodward, 190; Robert Gates, From the shadows [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996], 253-254).

States in the apparent belief that his hand would not be detected.

Vengeance was a strategically impoverished policy objective. Suppose Libya commissioned five terrorist attacks on American targets and all five succeeded. How would Libya accrue any benefit? Random attacks, conducted anonymously, would not produce predetermined changes in U.S. behavior, if only because the attacks could not be tied directly to Libyan interests without compromising the regime's deniability. By their very nature, terrorist attacks were destined to be futile as a means of enhancing Libyan security. Conversely, they had the potential to do great damage to their sponsor if discovered.

In point of fact, American intelligence services credited Qaddafi with ordering three terrorist attacks against American diplomats in the next two months. The first was a plot to assassinate Maxwell Rabb, the U.S. ambassador to Italy, who had to be recalled in October 1981 for his own protection.[53] On November 12, 1981, an unknown gunman fired six shots at the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Paris, Christian Chapman. Chapman escaped injury; Secretary of State Haig expressed the administration's suspicion that Libya was responsible. Finally, during that same month Libyan intelligence officers filled two stereo speakers with plastic

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[53] Lillian Craig Harris, Libya: Qadhafi's revolution and the modern state, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 101.

explosives in hopes of detonating them at a Khartoum club amidst scores of American diplomats and their families. That attack was thwarted by American and Sudanese authorities.[54]

The consequences were swift and sharp. The United States announced an embargo on Libyan oil and imposed export restrictions on petroleum and dual-use technologies. Given that the United States had hitherto been the destination for 40% of Libya's crude, the embargo accentuated the effects of a concurrent world oil glut and took a sharp toll on the Libyan economy.[55] In February 1982, JANA admitted 'the people were taken completely by surprise by the current oil glut . . .there is nothing left for them to do but to become a militant force.'[56]

Qaddafi apparently arrived at the same conclusion. He once again staked his credibility on a threat which he had little means of backing up: 'If America enters the Bay of Sidra war in the full sense of the word will begin between us and them, war with planes, navies, missiles and everything.'[57]

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[54] "U.S. bans imports of oil from Libya; 'Terror' role cited," International Herald Tribune, 11 March 1982.

[55] Harris, 117; Robert St. John, Qaddafi's world design: Libyan foreign policy, 1969-1987, (London: Saqi Books, 1987), 120; Michael Prest, "Headache for Qaddafi," Middle East International (27 November 1981): 12.

[56] SWB ME/6963/A/4, 25 February 1982.

[57] Robert Fisk, "Gaddafi threatens to go to war with US," The Times, 5 March 1982.

Incongruously, Qaddafi declared that Libya was nevertheless interested in restoring relations with Washington.[58] He implored the Austrian Foreign Minister, Willibald Pahr, to convey to Washington that America was pushing Libya into the Soviet camp.[59] Qaddafi expressed great confidence in Pahr, suggesting the Austrian could represent Libya much more effectively than his own diplomats. He expressed a willingness to immediately resume all relations with the United States.[60]

Pahr's demarche failed. On March 16, 1982, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy announced that the Sixth Fleet would return to the Gulf of Sirte in the next six months. Little else could have been expected from an initiative which essentially blamed Washington for Libya's behavior. (The entire overture was likely designed for European consumption, which was not a bad move since the gap between the European and American approaches to the Libyan question invited exploitation.) The substance of Qaddafi's message had never changed: 'America's fate is one doomed to perish . . . We are determined to defeat America, even if it were to use its atomic bombs.'[61]

By now Tripoli had received abundant signals that the new American administration was unlike any that

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[58] SWB ME/6970/A/4, 5 March 1982.

[59] "In from the cold," Middle East International, no. 171 (26 March 1982): 4.

[60] SWB ME/6977/A/4-6, 13 March 1982.

[61] SWB ME/6970/A/4-5, 5 March 1982.

Qaddafi and his comrades had dealt with before. In July 1981 the regime learned, from no less a source than *Newsweek*, that the CIA was attempting to assassinate Qaddafi. In March 1982 JANA claimed a CIA agent had warned Libyan intelligence of an impending U.S. air raid which would be disguised as an Israeli operation.[62] Moreover, Tripoli claimed to have abundant evidence that Washington was covertly probling its defenses.[63]

Despite these warning signals, Libya missed yet another opportunity to assume a low-profile and thereby reduce the risk of further military encounters with the United States. Indeed, Libya seemed to be seeking such an encounter and the state news agency declared that war was now inevitable.[64] On several occasions in 1983, F-14s from the Sixth Fleet intercepted LAF fighters attempting to penetrate the carrier's exclusion zone.[65]

Qaddafi's objective was still to reduce and ultimately eliminate the American military presence which seemed to be hemming him in on all sides. In a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Qaddafi complained that the presence of U.S. forces in Egypt, the Sudan, Somalia and Oman constituted 'a direct threat to

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[62] SWB ME/6975/A/4, 11 March 1982.

[63] "Libya claims downing a U.S. plane," International Herald Tribune, 7 October 1982; cf. SWB 8 October 1982.

[64] SWB ME/6981/A/1, 18 March 1982.

[65] "Qadhafi claims U.S. jet incident," International Herald Tribune, 2 May 1983.

the security of my country.'[66]

Thus far, the Libyan leader's strategy had produced little progress towards that end. In fact, the more Qaddafi tried to flex his military might in the Mediterranean, the more determined Washington became. Undaunted, he upped the ante by publicly ordering his air force to destroy any target entering the Gulf of Sirte and especially to shoot down any AWACS aircraft 'affecting' Libyan territory.[67] Both orders were clear contraventions of international law, yet Qaddafi believed that in this instance might made right:

> By entering Egypt to spy on Libya the AWACS plane becomes a hostile target, and Libya, with the right to self-defence, is entitled to tackle such a target. When the US Sixth Fleet comes to this region to threaten Libya, a state of war prevails and Libya then has the right to take all defensive measures, by force. In this case diplomacy is set aside, together with all other means, and force becomes the arbiter.[68]

Had the LAF carried out either order, a punitive American response would have been inevitable. The fact that neither order was fulfilled suggests that they were either secretly countermanded by the Colonel or gingerly resisted by the LAF. Perhaps both realized that Libya could ill afford the war its leader seemed so eager to initiate from the podium. In any event, mature states do not bandy about threats of war lightly, for doing so

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[66] "Libya goes to UN," Guardian, 10 August 1983.

[67] "U.S. F-14s chase Libyan jets over Mediterranean," International Herald Tribune, 4 August 1983; "Libya threatens to shoot down American Awacs," Times, 9 August 1983.

[68] SWB ME/7295/A/4-5, 30 March 1983.

ultimately dissipates their ability to deter or otherwise influence the behavior of fellow states. Qaddafi's almost routine use of the threat of war was thus a provocative and inherently self-enfeebling behavior.

Qaddafi's Soviet gambit

The August 1981 clash with the U.S. Sixth Fleet came close to being the elusive catalyst needed to bond the Libyan regime to the Kremlin. That same year Qaddafi concluded a security pact with two other Soviet clients, Ethiopia and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. In 1982 Libya signed treaties of friendship and cooperation with North Korea and Czechoslovakia, and the following year with Romania and Bulgaria. Qaddafi made state visits to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Libyan trade with the Soviet Union more than doubled over 1981 levels.[69] Moreover, Libya and the USSR conducted joint naval exercises in November 1982 and July 1983.[70] In January 1983 a Soviet submarine put in at Tobruk for a month-long maintenance period, the first such use of Libyan port facilities by the Soviet fleet.[71] Western defence planners began to operate on the assumption that the USSR would use Libya as a staging ground for Mediterranean operations in the event of an East-West

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[69] Bearman, 258.

[70] Anderson, 41.

[71] El Khawas, 151.

conflict.[72]

It seemed like a propitious moment for Libya to seek some form of bilateral security assurance from the USSR. In March 1983 Qaddafi sent Jalloud to Moscow yet again to solicit the Kremlin's approval of a treaty of friendship and cooperation between Libya and the Soviet Union.[73] Such a treaty would extend to Libya a degree of security far beyond what the nation could hope to achieve by relying solely upon its own resources. To Jalloud's delight, the Soviets approved such a treaty in theory, although its completion was put off until a later date. Qaddafi jubilantly told his countrymen: 'Let the USA understand that Libya has approximately 3,000 kilometers of coast on the Mediterranean. Libya, to vex the USA, can give the necessary facilities to the superpower which is hostile to the USA.'[74]

Over the next two years, Libya's relations with the Soviet bloc appeared to steadily tighten. In March 1984 Libya signed a military co-operation agreement with East Germany, and in early April the Yugoslavian and Bulgarian Defence Ministers visited Tripoli and held talks with Libya's national security figureheads, Abu Bakr Younis

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[72] e.g., Drew Middleton, "A Soviet peril: Bases in Libya," New York Times, 1 March 1981.

[73] The Economist Intelligence Unit, Quarterly Economic Review: Libya, Tunisia, Malta no. 3, 1983.

[74] As quoted in Bearman, 263.

Jabir and Mustafa Kharroubi.[75] In September 1984, the Libyan navy sent three ships to Odessa, and the following year Libya conducted three joint naval-air exercises with the USSR.[76] The Soviet Mediterranean Eskadra was reportedly given expanded access to the port of Al-Bardia, a mere 12 miles from the Egyptian border.[77] In addition to a drydock, the port was fitted with a copious covered area (750m x 285m) to defeat satellite reconnaissance.[78] Finally, in June 1985 the USSR transferred a number of patrol planes to Libya, which Soviet pilots used for reconnaissance flights over the Mediterranean.[79]

Superficially, relations between Libya and the USSR had never been better. Yet there was an enormous qualitative difference between having an agreement in principle to sign a bilateral pact, and having the pact in hand. The Kremlin's hesitancy to sign the treaty suggested that Moscow was plagued by lingering doubts about Qaddafi's utility as a client. In fact, the promise of a treaty may have been a means of stringing

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[75] "Defence ties forged with socialist countries," Jamihiriya Review 47 (May-June 1984), 8.

[76] Maurizio Cremasco, "Two uncertain futures: Tunisia and Libya," in Prospects for security in the Mediterranean, ed. Robert O'Neill, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1988), 199.

[77] Yossef Bodansky, "Soviet military presence in Libya," Armed forces journal international, no. 118 (November 1980): 89.

[78] FBIS, 12 September 1985, D1.

[79] "Soviet firepower for Libya," Newsweek, (15 July 1985): 17.

Tripoli along as Qaddafi spent literally billions of dollars on Soviet weaponry. After restoring ambassadorial relations with Egypt in 1984, Moscow certainly had less need of Tripoli. Moreover, the rapid turnover in the Soviet hierarchy meant that by 1985, Qaddafi's standing with the Kremlin had undergone a radical devaluation. The new Soviet General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, had a much lower estimation of Libya's strategic value than did his predecessors. Gorbachev (who assumed power in March 1985) had a fresh vision of the Cold War and of the Soviet Union's future, a vision in which nations such as Libya played little role.

The depreciation of Libya's stock immediately became apparent when Qaddafi, hoping to consummate the treaty of friendship, arrived in Moscow on October 10, 1985. Whereas on his last visit he had been personally greeted at the airport by Brezhnev, on this occasion he was met by Soviet President Andre Gromyko. The adjustment in diplomatic protocol was a sure indication that Qaddafi's standing had slipped; the Colonel returned the snub by skipping a banquet held in his honor that evening.[80] The ensuing talks were also disappointing for Qaddafi, who attempted to purchase the USSR's most sophisticated air defense system, Su-27 fighters, and additional submarines. The Soviets merely promised to consider

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[80] Africa confidential 26, no. 23 (13 November 1985): 6.

these requests.[81]

Qaddafi, who was experiencing a cash crunch and thus having difficulty in making payments for the arms he had already purchased, proposed to double his oil exports to the USSR. But the Soviets were not interested in additional oil, and promised only that Yugoslavia would increase its imports. Qaddafi next sought assistance in constructing a nuclear reactor capable of producing weapons-grade material. The Soviets pointedly replied that they would not countenance Libyan attempts to construct an atomic bomb.

The final and most consequential item on Qaddafi's agenda was conclusion of the promised treaty. However, his interlocutors made it clear that the treaty had been indefinitely shelved. The best he could draw out of the Russians was a joint communique condemning 'the provocative military maneuvers carried out by the USA in the Mediterranean including the Gulf of Sirte and near the eastern borders of Libya,' and expressions of 'grave concern' over the presence of cruise missiles at Comiso.[82]

Qaddafi was caught off guard by this cool reception. Hadn't he made extraordinary overtures to the Soviets and their allies in recent years?

Yes. He had not, however, given the Soviets what

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[81] "The Soviet-Libyan relationship: Has Qaddafi outlived his usefulness?" Pemcon Ltd., December 1985, 10.

[82] SWB SU/8084/A4/3, 17 October 1985.

they had always wanted: permanent bases in Libya.[83] Moreover, Gorbachev was considerably more anxious than his predecessors to avoid conflict with the NATO powers. He had obviously thought twice about the wisdom of pledging to defend a state that was more likely than most to embroil him in such a conflict. Gorbachev was willing to retain Libya as a client, but only so long as Qaddafi behaved.

Thus, the Kremlin agreed to upgrade the LAF's air defenses, although not to the extent which Qaddafi had hoped. In December 1985 the Soviets began delivering SA-5 anti-aircraft missiles to Tripoli.[84] By autumn batteries had been constructed around Libya's most strategic sites.[85] Significantly, the Soviets betrayed their lack of faith in Qaddafi's judgement by cautioning Tripoli against using its SA-5s against any American aircraft over the Mediterranean.[86]

The U.S. State Department strenuously protested the SA-5 sale, calling it a 'significant and dangerous escalation in the Soviet-Libyan arms relationship' which 'clearly exceeds any legitimate security requirements the

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[83] The Middle East Military Balance 1985, (Boulder: Westview Press), 176.

[84] Jacqueline Hahn, "Libya: Intelligence briefing," IDF Journal 3, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 37.

[85] Richard Beeston, "Russia sends new missiles to Gaddafi," Daily Telegraph, 23 December 1985; Newsweek, (15 July 1985); Defense and Foreign Affairs Weekly, (30 September 1985).

[86] "Moscow 'cautions Gadaffi'," Financial Times, 31 January 1986.

Libyans have.'[87] The SA-5's range and altitude theoretically enabled it to threaten AWACS over Egypt or the Gulf of Sidra.[88] But in practice, the SA-5 was less formidable and did not redress the holes in the LAF's air defenses revealed by the October 1st Israeli raid on PLO headquarters at Tunis, which the LAF failed to detect or intercept. In fact, compared to missiles and countermeasures available to Western air forces, the SA-5 was already nearing obsolescence.[89]

The exaggerated U.S. reaction to the SA-5 reflected Washington's determination to use even the slightest evidence of Libyan malfeasance as a hook for its 'get Qaddafi' policy. The invasion scenarios which had long preoccupied Tripoli were no longer as fantastic as they had once been. In December 1985 the Reagan administration disclosed it had authorized the Department of Defense to draw up contingency plans for invading Libya.[90] The Pentagon, however, was not exactly chafing at the bit to enter a messy but inconsequential land war in North Africa and drew up plans for a six division

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[87] Bob Woodward and Lou Cannon, "Soviet rejects protest by U.S. on Libyan SAMs," International Herald Tribune, 23 December 1985.

[88] Richard Beeston, "Russia sends new missiles to Gaddafi," Daily Telegraph, 23 December 1985.

[89] Bob Woodward and Lou Cannon, "Soviet rejects protest by U.S. on Libyan SAMs," International Herald Tribune, 23 December 1985.

[90] The plan was apparently proposed by National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane and his staff. In his memoirs, Weinberger called the proposal 'particularly silly' (Weinberger, 201).

attack that, in the words of one administration official, resembled the D-Day invasion of Normandy in 1944. With the Pentagon's reluctance obvious, and no other senior official willing to push the point, the plan was scrapped.[91]

Details of an even earlier contingency plan leaked out in 1987. This proposed campaign featured an Egyptian invasion supported by U.S. air power. According to the plan, Qaddafi would either fall or be easily toppled once Egyptian forces had occupied the eastern half of the country. Not everyone in the Reagan administration was enthused, and the State Department concluded that the key to scuttling the operation was to invite the Egyptians to join in the contingency planning. After unproductive talks between Vice-Admiral John Poindexter, Deputy Director of the NSC, and Egyptian President Mubarak and Defence Minister Abdel-Halim Abu Ghazala in September 1985 and another round of military-to-military consultations in February 1986, the plan was buried.[92] The Egyptians had no intention of playing Washington's hatchet man.

However, by February 1986 the White House was prepared to take unilateral action in order to curb Libya's sponsorship of attacks on U.S. targets.

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[91] Gates, 352-353. See also Richard Beeston, "Russia sends new missiles to Gaddafi," Daily Telegraph, 23 December 1985.

[92] Bob Woodward and Don Oberdorfer, "State Dept. said to thwart '85 plan to invade Libya," International Herald Tribune, 22 February 1987.

High noon over the Gulf of Sirte

The horrific terrorist attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports on December 27, 1985, which left twenty dead (including five Americans), incensed Ronald Reagan as few other events ever had. One of the terrorists carried a Tunisian passport which had been confiscated from a Tunisian worker by Libyan authorities. As Reagan observed, it was not difficult to figure out where the terrorist obtained his passport.[93] The Libyan state news agency hailed the massacre as a heroic action.[94] Though Tripoli subsequently tried to distance itself from the operation, Libya's position provoked international outrage and convinced Reagan that it was once again time to confront Tripoli. The NSC's Crisis Pre-Planning Group ordered the Pentagon to draft fresh contingency plans for attacking Libya with B-52 and F-111 strikes.[95]

On January 7, 1986, Reagan issued an Executive Order severing all economic ties with Libya and ordering American citizens working there to return home. The White House did not want any American workers to become convenient hostages if and when military reprisals began. By the end of the month U.S. navy pilots were again buzzing Libyan airspace, and in early February additional elements of the Sixth Fleet began taking up position

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[93] Reagan, 511.

[94] "Libyans, in anti-U.S. rallies, vow to fight an attack," International Herald Tribune, 5 January 1986.

[95] Seymour Hersh, "Target Qaddafi," New York Times Magazine (22 February 1987): A4.

outside the Gulf of Sirte.[96] U.S. officials sounded out the Egyptians on the possibility of mutual military action, and President Reagan issued a presidential finding (reversing a position taken by Carter) that would enable U.S. forces to support an Egyptian attack on Libya.[97]

From Washington's perspective, the solution to the Libyan problem was to incrementally increase Tripoli's discomfort until reaching Qaddafi's pain threshold, at which point the Libyan would presumably behave himself. In 1981 it became evident that the principal defect of this strategy was that as the decibel level of the Libyan-U.S. contest rose, so too did Qaddafi's profile.[98] The prominence which the international media devoted to his activities exceeded anything he had previously enjoyed, and the Colonel himself gloatingly referred to Reagan's attentions as 'an international medal of honor.'[99] On the other hand, the intensity of Washington's focus on ending Libyan terrorism obliged America's European allies to impose an arms ban on Libya.[100]

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[96] George Wilson, "U.S. fighters to fly near Libyan coast," International Herald Tribune, 24 January 1986.

[97] Herman Eilts, "The United States and Egypt," in The Middle East ten years after Camp David, ed. William Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 132.

[98] David Hirst, "Defiant Gadafy thrives on US challenge," Guardian, 11 January 1986; Gates, 255.

[99] SWB ME/6748/A/5, 13 June 1981.

[100] Paul Lewis, "Europe agrees to ban arms to countries backing terror," New York Times, 28 January 1986.

Qaddafi, realizing that a clash was inevitable, was torn between the need to seek cover and his desire to bask in the international spotlight. For example, on January 28 Qaddafi sought assurances from President Chadli Benjedid that Algeria would not participate in any U.S. or Egyptian military actions.[101] However, as in 1981, the prospect of standing toe-to-toe with the United States (a prospect made more alluring in that it echoed the most dramatic elements of Qaddafi's self-conception) was irresistible. Showmanship, not strategy, prompted Qaddafi to patrol his self-declared 'Line of Death' in a Libyan warship.[102]

Having given Americans in Libya a reasonable period in which to return home, the White House was now prepared to act. Three U.S. aircraft carriers and thirty escorting ships entered the Gulf of Sidra in late March 1986, ostensibly on another freedom of navigation exercise. In reality, the U.S. pilots were buzzing Libyan airspace in search of a fight.[103] On March 24, they found one: Libyan SAM emplacements opened fire on U.S. aircraft. None of the missiles hit their targets. Signal intercepts revealed that Libyan MiG-25s were ordered to fire at U.S. planes if they could achieve a

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[101] George Henderson, "Theatre of the absurd," Middle East International, no. 268 (7 February 1986): 8.

[102] ibid.; Miller, 225-226.

[103] *Sovetskaya Rossiya* quoted an American pilot who candidly described his job as being a 'sitting duck.' SWB SU/8218/A4/8, 27 March 1986.

missile-lock.[104] The Sixth Fleet unleashed an answering barrage on March 25-26. Two Libyan warships were sunk, two others damaged, and an SA-5 battery at Sirte was struck twice.

Contrary to fact, Qaddafi claimed that his forces downed three U.S. aircraft.[105] He was doubtlessly disappointed that the Libyan armed forces had failed to inflict any damage on the Sixth Fleet, but perhaps grateful that the American response was limited (if of debatable proportionality). Over the next few days the Jamahirya followed the same script as in 1981. Though defeated, Qaddafi remained defiant (urging the murder of American oil workers in the Middle East), yet Libya was careful not to make any overt offense.[106] Routine air force flights were cancelled lest they occasion additional combat, and blackouts were enforced for two days.[107] Hopeful that another opportunity would present itself, the reinforced Sixth Fleet lingered off Libyan shores until April.

The La Belle bombing

As in 1981, Qaddafi could not let defeat pass

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[104] George Schultz, Turmoil and triumph: My years as Secretary of State, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 681.

[105] SWB ME/8227/A/1, 8 April 1986.

[106] "Libya threatens 'sea of fire,'" New York Times, 25 March 1986.

[107] Edward Schumacher, "Soviet advisers took shelter at base for Sirte raids, foreign workers say," International Herald Tribune, 29 March 1986.

without seeking some form of vengeance. He again turned to terrorism; by April 7 the CIA had details of no less than nine Libyan terrorist attacks that were under consideration or had been ordered by Tripoli.[108] On March 25, Tripoli ordered the People's Bureaux in East Berlin, Paris, Rome, Madrid and elsewhere to prepare terrorist attacks, unaware that the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), had compromised Libyan diplomatic communications. On April 5, 1986, the La Belle Club, a West Berlin discotheque frequented by American servicemen, was bombed.[109] Two patrons were killed and some 150 were wounded, more than 50 of whom were Americans. Afterwards, the Libyan embassy in East Berlin (little realizing the NSA was reading its cable traffic) boasted to Tripoli that the operation had been completed 'without leaving clues.'[110]

Qaddafi knew that Washington would suspect Libya of conducting the bombing. Leaving nothing to chance, he made a series of threats immediately prior to and after the La Belle bombing to deter the United States from taking punitive military action against Tripoli. This

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[108] Gates, 353.

[109] For years Libyan apologists accused the U.S. of fabricating the intercepts. The U.S. was admittedly reluctant, due to the intelligence methods involved, to release all of the information at its disposal. In fact, Reagan's decision to publicize even part of the intercept created notable consternation within the intelligence community. In late 1996, German prosecutors indicted three Libyan embassy employees for the bombing, vindicating the U.S. position.

[110] Schultz, 683; Gates 353.

was a dubious policy choice: threatening to spread violence 'against America, its civilians and military targets in all the world's continent' was not a particularly effective way of disassociating his regime from terrorism.[111] Likewise, threatening retaliation against any European state abetting the Sixth Fleet brought Libya little sympathy.[112] Spain and Italy, for example, publicly rebuked Tripoli, and Spain recalled its ambassador for consultations.[113] A few months later the Libyan ambassador to Spain was obliged to leave the country at Madrid's request, having been implicated in two terrorist operations.[114]

More importantly, Qaddafi's principal threat--that the Soviet Union would come to his aid if war erupted--was not credible.[115] Only a few weeks earlier the Soviets had pointedly refused to intervene as the Sixth Fleet unleashed its force on the Libyan navy, just as they had failed to come to Qaddafi's aid in 1981. The Kremlin's belated protests were strictly pro forma (for example, they postponed but did not cancel a scheduled trip by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze to Washington).

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[111] SWB ME/8230/i, 11 April 1986.

[112] A threat made on numerous occasions. See, for example, SWB ME/8232/i, 14 April 1986; Schultz, 681.

[113] SWB ME/8221/i, 1 April 1986; SWB ME/8231/i, 12 April 1986.

[114] "Libyan ambassador makes a quiet exit at Spain's request," New York Times, 31 May 1986.

[115] SWB ME/8230/i, 11 April 1986.

Aware that Moscow had declined to conclude a treaty of friendship with Libya, Secretary Schultz concluded the Soviets found Qaddafi's behavior embarrassing.[116] The White House therefore had little fear of calling Qaddafi's bluff.

As a policy instrument, invoking the Soviet threat was counterproductive to boot. Gorbachev was not about to let a Third World client manipulate the USSR into a direct conflict with the United States. As subsequent events demonstrated, the Soviet Union decided to let the Libyan leader face the consequences of his behavior alone.

Thus, Libya was more isolated than ever, with an American fleet poised on its doorstep, when Qaddafi ordered the La Belle operation. The bombing itself had no strategic value. Killing and wounding a handful of American servicemen did not bring Qaddafi any closer to achieving his political objectives. It did, however, provide Reagan with the smoking gun he had long been seeking. Armed with the NSA intercepts and assured of domestic support, the White House set the Pentagon's wheels in motion. On April 15, 1986, the United States launched Operation El Dorado Canyon, a joint air force-navy bombing attack on five military targets in Tripoli and Benghazi, including Qaddafi's personal residence in

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[116] Schultz, 682.

the Bab Al Aziziya barracks.[117]

The raid itself was over in less than fifteen minutes. When the smoke cleared, three army barracks and several hangars were damaged, one warehouse used in the assembly of MiGs was destroyed, five Soviet-supplied heavy transport aircraft were destroyed as were two helicopters, and at least four MiGs were damaged or destroyed.[118]

Despite the billions of dollars spent on military hardware in the preceding decade, the Libyan armed forces proved ineffectual. Many soldiers panicked and abandoned their posts.[119] The air force failed--or declined--to launch a single fighter to intercept or pursue the American jets. In fact, Libyan fighters did not resume their daily coastal patrols for several days.[120] The response of the air defence command was somewhat better, and probably accounted for the loss of one U.S. F-111. Yet overall, it was a poor showing for a country which had ample warning that an attack was imminent and had

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[117] The most detailed account of the raid is found in Robert Venkus, Raid on Qaddafi (New York: St. Martin's, 1992).

[118] "Libyan SAM missiles hit civilian areas, says USA," Jane's Defence Weekly 5, no. 16 (26 April 1986): 737; Weinberger, 198. For a comprehensive mission autopsy, see Anthony H. Cordesman, "The uses of force in the Middle East," in The Atlantic Alliance and the Middle East, eds. Joseph Coffey and Gianni Bonvicini, (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 128-136.

[119] Edward Schumacher, "Libya finds fault with military after bad showing in U.S. attack," New York Times, 27 April 1986.

[120] Con Coughlin, "Kremlin pressing Gaddafi to adopt lower profile," Daily Telegraph, 25 April 1986.

been at a heightened state of alert.[121]

Qaddafi was badly shaken by the raid but escaped personal injury, apparently because Maltese Prime Minister Carmelo Bonnici called to warn him that an attack was imminent 45 minutes before the first bombs fell.[122] In the immediate aftermath of the bombing he went to ground, and with the exception of a televised speech two days after the attack, did not appear in public and apparently withdrew from day-to-day management of government affairs. He was rumored to be suffering from depression.[123]

Qaddafi's low profile was prudent in more ways than one. For the first time, his policies had brought destruction upon the Libyan capital, and the Libyan armed forces (who bore the brunt of the damage) were reportedly in foul humor. There were reports of sporadic gunfire on April 16, followed by naval gunfire the next day; Libyan naval officers were said to be outraged by the lack of air support provided to them.[124] As days passed and Qaddafi failed to emerge, rumors of a power struggle within the regime circulated. None were ever verified, yet it was ironic that it was the failure of Qaddafi's

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[121] David Willey, "Qadhafi survives invasion of Islam," Observer, 20 April 1986.

[122] NFSL Newsletter no. 50, (August-September 1986): 3; "Gadaffi's raid tip-off," Times, 29 October 1988.

[123] George Henderson, "Down but not out," Middle East International, no. 278 (27 June 1986): 10.

[124] John Cooley, "To the shores of Tripoli," Middle East International no. 274, (2 May 1986): 6-7.

policies which may have restored some constraints on his freedom of action.

Retaliation

Predictably, Qaddafi's value system compelled him to retaliate against his attackers. Shortly after the bombing of Tripoli, Libya fired two Scud B missiles at a U.S. radar station on the Italian island of Lampedusa.[125] Both missiles splashed harmlessly into the Mediterranean.

Much like the La Belle operation, the attack on Lampedusa may have provided emotional catharsis but certainly produced no military benefit. Diplomatically, attacking Italy was not one of the Colonel's more astute moves. European criticism of the United States had hitherto been sharp. Spain and France had each refused to allow the American planes to overfly their territory. Such a rift might have been exploited to considerable benefit. Instead, Libya emerged as a ballistic missile threat to Southern Europe. Even Italy, noted for its tolerance towards its former colony, was alarmed. Things would have been even worse had the missiles found their targets and triggered a NATO response.

Qaddafi's intent was to intimidate. Immediately after the Scud attack, he explicitly warned Spain and Italy that if they did not turn away the Sixth Fleet from their ports 'we will be forced to escalate the operations

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[125] FBIS, 17 April 1986, Q3; "Libyan Scud B attack on Lampedusa island," Jane's Defence Weekly 5, no. 16 (26 April 1986): 739.

in self-defense.'[126] Once again, his threats did not produce the desired outcome. To the contrary, Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi warned that Italy would respond with military force if attacked again. Potential economic sanctions--such as seizing Libya's 15% share in Fiat--were raised to give Tripoli further pause.[127] The Italian armed forces began shoring up their southern defenses. Embarrassed by their lack of contingency plans for responding to an attack from North Africa, Italian defence officials turned a new eye on their southern neighbor and began developing an Italian rapid reaction force to deal with future Libyan contingencies.[128] Finally, the European Community as a whole placed restrictions upon the activities of Libyan diplomats, and six European states began expelling Libyan nationals.[129]

Terrorism--cheaper and more dramatic than missile attacks--was still the Colonel's preferred means of avenging himself. Within days of the U.S. raid, four Libyans were arrested in Turkey after trying to plant a suitcase filled with explosives at an American officer's

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[126] FBIS, 17 April 1986, Q3.

[127] E.J. Dionne Jr., "Italy says it will strike back if Libya attacks its territory," International Herald Tribune, 21 April 1986.

[128] Luigi Caligaris, "Italy," in Politics and security in the southern region of the Atlantic Alliance, ed. Douglas Stuart, (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 89-90.

[129] "Europe gets tough on Libya; may do more at summit," Christian Science Monitor, William Echikson, 24 April 1986.

club in Ankara.[130] A week later, the Libyan ambassador to Spain directed the attempted bombing of a Bank of America office. On August 3, 1986, a Libyan-backed group launched a rocket attack on the British airfield at Akrotiri, Cyprus. Almost simultaneously, the government of Togo revealed that it had foiled a Libyan plot to blow up the American embassy there.[131] The following month in Karachi, four gunmen were arrested after spraying a Pan Am airplane with bullets, killing 21; also arrested was an Arab man with a Libyan passport who claimed he was on a 'special mission' Libyan intelligence.[132] Finally, the White House received 'credible' reports that Qaddafi purchased the death of an American hostage in Lebanon, Peter Kilburn, as well as that of two British hostages. All three were killed in cold blood.[133]

The attacks continued into the following years. On the first anniversary of the American action, the U.S. embassy in Madrid was attacked by homemade rockets. The following year a Japanese Red Army terrorist was arrested en route to New York City, where he planned to blow up

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[130] Nigel Hawkes, Simon Hoggart, and Robin Lustig, "US ready to strike again," Observer, 20 April 1986.

[131] Lillian Craig Harris, "America's Libya policy has failed," Middle East International, no. 285 (10 October 1986): 14.

[132] Woodward, 475.

[133] Reagan, 520; "Michael Norman, "One of 3 hostages slain in Lebanon was U.S. librarian," New York Times, 19 April 1986.

several targets on the anniversary of the April bombings.[134] The Japanese Red Army (presumably acting on Tripoli's instructions) was also suspected of authoring an attack on a USO club in Naples on April 14, 1988, and was probably responsible for planting a bomb at a U.S. air base in torrejon, Spain, the following day.[135] In July 1988 six Libyans were arrested by FBI agents for violating the American embargo on Libya; one was also accused of conspiring to assassinate former NSC staffer Oliver North.[136] Libya may also have been responsible for the shooting of an American diplomat in Khartoum.[137]

Disenchantment with the USSR

As was to be expected, Libya's confidence in the USSR plunged as a result of the April bombings.[138] Prior to El Dorado Canyon, the Soviets routinely shared naval intelligence about the Sixth Fleet with Tripoli.[139] This cooperation ended in March, just when the Libyans needed

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[134] James DeHart and Jerrold Post, "Responding to Qaddafi," Christian Science Monitor, 7 January 1992.

[135] E.A. Wayne, "Is Libya behind anti-US strikes? American officials believe Qaddafi enlisted Japanese Red Army for terrorist acts," Christian Science Monitor, 10 May 1988.

[136] Christopher Thomas, "US officials say North was target of alleged Libyan plot," Times, 22 July 1988.

[137] Harris, 102.

[138] Christopher Dickey, "Libya without Qadhafi: Chaos is feared," International Herald Tribune, 20 April 1986.

[139] Cremasco, 199; "U.S. says Soviet helps Libya track navy," International Herald Tribune, 15 January 1986; Michael Binyon, "US fighters scramble to see off Gadaffi jets," Times (15 January 1986).

it most.[140] *Sovetskaya Rossiya* denied that the USSR had any advance warning of the attack.[141] However, when the American assault came the Soviets suddenly 'lost' the Sixth Fleet and 'failed to detect' the inbound warplanes.[142] The Libyans were incensed.

For their part, the Soviets were angry that Qaddafi had discounted their warnings to abandon terrorism and felt that the time had come for him to be taught a lesson.[143] If, as was rumored, several Soviet advisers assigned to Libyan air defence units were killed during the March air strikes, the Soviets had further cause for disgruntlement.[144] Moscow certainly took pains to ensure that there would be no further Soviet casualties. According to Israeli intelligence sources, Soviet advisers were withdrawn from Libyan radar and missile batteries shortly before the April raid.[145] Soviet naval

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[140] e.g., Edward Schumacher, "Lukewarm Soviet support worries Libya," International Herald Tribune, 15 April 1986.

[141] SWB SU/8245/A4/1, 29 April 1986.

[142] Alexei Vassiliev, Russian policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to pragmatism (Reading, England: Ithaca Press, 1993), 286.

[143] Vassiliev, 289. Alleged CIA reports cited in the Washington Post indicated that the Soviets were hoping to replace Qaddafi with Jalloud (Martin Sicker, The making of a pariah state [New York: Prager, 1987], 109-110).

[144] Edward Schumacher, "Lukewarm Soviet support worries Libya," International Herald Tribune, 15 April 1986.

[145] Andrew Whitely, "Israeli intelligence says Soviet Union wants to avoid clash," Times, 21 April 1986.

units docked in Libya took similar precautions.[146]

In the end, the Kremlin offered little more than rhetorical support to its beleaguered client.[147] Insomuch as Moscow made token efforts to help the Libyans militarily, its intent was apparently to bolster the USSR's sagging prestige in the Arab world. Libya, for its part, had no where else to turn and therefore once again raised the prospect of joining the Warsaw pact. In May 1986 Jalloud travelled to Moscow for fruitless talks with Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Defense Minister, Sergei Sokolov, afterwards remarking that for Libya, 'neutrality is naivete.'[148] A Soviet delegation was sent soon afterwards to assess Libya's defense needs.[149] Moscow replaced three of the five transport planes destroyed by the F-111s, and delivered the first of two 'Koni' type frigates to Libya.[150] Emboldened by this addition, the Libyan navy carried out missile exercises in the Gulf of Sirte and threatened to counter any

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[146] Times, 23 April 1986; Con Coughlin, "Kremlin pressing Gaddafi to adopt lower profile," Daily Telegraph, 25 April 1986.

[147] Alvin Z. Rubinstein, Moscow's Third World Strategy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 165; e.g., "Moscow stresses naval rights," Financial Times, 18 April 1986.

[148] SWB SU/8271/A4/3, 29 May 1986; Yehudit Ronen, "Libya," in Middle East contemporary survey, vol. x (1986), ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 516.

[149] "Libya says Soviet will give weapons," International Herald Tribune, 2 June 1986.

[150] Con Coughlin, "Kremlin pressing Gaddafi to adopt lower profile," Daily Telegraph, 25 April 1986; "Soviet frigate new naval reinforcement for Libya," Jane's Defence Weekly 5, no. 26, (5 July 1986): 1275.

further incursions.[151] Significantly, this time Tripoli refrained from threatening Soviet intervention.

In a final desperate bid for Soviet protection, Qaddafi announced that Libya was willing to join the Warsaw Pact, give the USSR permission to establish a permanent naval base at Tobruk, and even allow Moscow to deploy nuclear missiles in Libya.[152] But the time for an alliance with the Kremlin had passed, and Qaddafi's overture went unanswered.

Postlude

Qaddafi remained at loggerheads with the White House for the remainder of Reagan's presidency, and continued his policy of lending rhetorical, financial, and military support to nearly any group similarly disposed--even when these groups otherwise bore at best tangential relevance to Libyan interests. Libya's activism in the South Pacific makes an illustrative example.

Libya established diplomatic relations with the South Pacific state of Vanuatu in May 1986. Through the auspices of a sympathetic politician, Barak Sope, Libyan diplomats made contact with the 'Front Uni pour la liberation des Kanaks' (FULK), a militant faction of the New Caledonian independence movement. Tripoli also became a supporter of the Irian Jaya liberation movement

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[151] George Henderson, "Still bent on revenge", Middle East International, (25 July 1986): 9.

[152] During a May 1987 interview with NBC News. James Barron, "Qaddafi in a warning to U.S.," New York Times, 31 May 1987.

'Organisasi Papua Merdeka' and maintained links to the Moro National Liberation Front, a Philippino Muslim separatist movement. A few dozen FULK members and other islanders were flown to Libya and given 'security' training.[153]

Libya's flirtations with such movements produced consternation in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, and the Solomon Islands (the foreign ministers of Australia and New Zealand held private talks on the subject of Libya's activities, which was probably to accord Libya's activities more attention than they merited). More to the point, Libya's activism annoyed both the United States and France, each of which had serious equities at stake in the region.

However, it readily became apparent that Libya could not sustain its South Pacific diplomacy. The Vanuatan Prime Minister, Walter Lini, rejected Libya's application to open a People's Bureau (i.e., an embassy), permitted New Zealand to establish a High Commission, and expelled the two Libyan diplomats Sope had invited into the country.[154] Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Tonga also rebuffed Libyan attempts to establish diplomatic relations.[155] Australia closed the People's

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[153] David Hegarty, Libya and the South Pacific (Working Paper No. 127, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1987), 7-10.

[154] Ken Ross, Prospects for crisis prediction: A South Pacific case study (Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence no. 65, 1990).

[155] Hegarty, 11.

Bureau in Canberra. Thus, rather than demonstrating Libya's global influence, Qaddafi's brief venture into the South Pacific merely accentuated the disconnect between Tripoli's aspirations and means.

Libya and the lesser powers

Thus far, this chapter has centered on Libya's relations with the United States and the USSR, as these countries respectively posed Tripoli's greatest security challenge and the best hope of remedying that challenge during the Reagan era. We have seen that Qaddafi failed to fashion a national security policy that reconciled the conflicting imperatives of his world view and the limits of Third World statehood: his readiness for confrontation with the United States was incompatible both with Libya's limited resources and with his own reluctance to subject himself to Soviet patronage. This failure was violently demonstrated by the April 1986 raids on Tripoli and Benghazi. By then, of course, the window of opportunity had closed. The tepid Soviet reaction to the raids debunked once and for all the notion that Libya had found security in Moscow's embrace.

Libya's interactions with the superpowers did not transpire in a vacuum, and Tripoli's dealings with other states often reflected its preoccupation with the Cold War giants. As demonstrated, Tripoli waded into a bewildering number of conflicts--from Latin America to the South Pacific--whenever it appeared possible to deal

a setback to American interests, thereby advancing (in theory) the cause of Libyan security. To a limited degree, Libya's regional security objectives evolved in tandem with external events. Overall, however, they remained remarkably constant and can be summarized as follows:

> To persuade or coerce Egypt to renounce its peace treaty with Israel and to sever its ties to the United States.
>
> To prevent the formation of potentially hostile alliances among Libya's neighbors. On the eastern front, this meant persuading or coercing the Numeiri government in Sudan to break relations with Egypt. On the eastern front, this meant preventing the formation of a Maghribi bloc excluding Libya and, failing that, to offset such a bloc through a counteralliance.

In this subsidiary strata of Libyan national security policy, the pattern of state behavior remained confrontational, coercive, and in general, counterproductive. To be sure, Qaddafi had his occasional triumphs. These, however, were fleeting and did not offset his losses--which, as usual, were largely self-induced.

The Eastern front: Egypt and Sudan

The assassination of Anwar El Sadat in October 1981 was hailed with jubilation in Tripoli. Though Libya was not responsible for the assassination, it regarded Sadat's death as a major victory. With naked glee Qaddafi took to the airwaves and urged Cairenes to

dismember Sadat's corpse.[156]

His euphoria dimmed, however, once it became clear that Egypt would not soon abandon the peace treaty with Israel which was Sadat's principal legacy.[157] Thus, Libya became a strident critic of the Mubarak government-Qaddafi referred to the new president as Hosni al-Bariq (Hosni the sick) and predicted that he would meet Sadat's fate--and called for its overthrow (and, if the semi-official Egyptian press is to be believed, continued to send saboteurs across the border).[158] So far as Qaddafi was concerned, even with his arch-nemesis gone Egypt remained an 'agent regime.'

The price of antagonizing Egypt was to see Cairo's links to Washington grow ever stronger. Realizing this, Tripoli eventually began to moderate its strident attacks on Cairo. However, neither Qaddafi's recriminations nor his belated steps towards reconciliation persuaded Egypt to forego its partnership with the United States. Though Mubarak would not countenance an invasion of Libya, he was not displeased by the Reagan administration's assertive approach to Tripoli. In point of fact, after the 1986 bombings Qaddafi sent an envoy to Egypt to request military support in the form of submarines and anti-aircraft missiles--items of obvious relevance to any

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[156] Jehan Sadat, A woman of Egypt (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 450.

[157] In September 1984 Qaddafi offered Egypt $5 billion to break relations with Israel; Cairo refused.

[158] Ronen, 521; Deeb, 153; Harris, 92.

further clashes with the American navy, yet a laughable request in light of Libyan-Egyptian relations. Egypt coolly declined to help.[159]

Qaddafi's failure to achieve his first regional goal--a reversal of Egyptian foreign policy--was echoed by his inability to foster a breach between Cairo and Khartoum. In early 1981, Qaddafi offered to arm and organize the Sudanese army, even while suggesting that the Sudanese regime was in the grips of Egyptian intelligence.[160] Unsurprisingly, this blatantly subversive overture backfired: the much-alarmed Sudanese (who were in the midst of a diplomatic spat with Cairo) restored full diplomatic relations with Egypt.[161] Consequently, Qaddafi reverted to supporting Sudanese rebels.[162] Officials in Khartoum blamed Libya for a rash of bombings.[163] In March 1981, Sudan called for Libya's ejection from the Arab League.[164] A few months later Khartoum expelled the Libyan ambassador to Sudan.

These actions, as well as Sudan's participation in Operation Bright Star in November 1981 infuriated Qaddafi. In March 1982 he warned that 'any (external)

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[159] NFSL Newsletter no. 47 (April 1986): 4.

[160] SWB ME/6654/i, 20 February 1981.

[161] SWB ME/6680/A/1, 23 March 1981.

[162] SWB ME/1682/A/1, 25 March 1981; SWB ME/6693/A/1, 7 April 1981.

[163] SWB ME/6968/A/4, 3 March 1982.

[164] SWB ME/6683 A/1, 26 March 1981.

intervention on the side of the collapsing fascist government in Sudan . . . will force us to exercise our duty of military, economic and political intervention on the side of the Sudanese people.'[165]

The renewal of the Sudanese civil war in 1983 allowed Qaddafi to channel weapons and financial aid to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). To further pressure Khartoum, Qaddafi promised to finance the construction of Ethiopian dams to imperil the Nile flow to Sudan and Egypt.[166]

Tripoli seemed oblivious to the openings its threats created for Libya's enemies to increase their influence in Khartoum. In February 1983, Libyan ground and air forces began amassing at a new airbase at the al-Kufra oasis, close to the borders of both Egypt and the Sudan.[167] Fearing that Libya would invade Sudan, Presidents Mubarak and Numeiri appealed to Washington for a show of force.[168] Washington happily deployed four AWACs to Egypt and repositioned the aircraft carrier

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[165] SWB ME/6972/B/6, 8 March 1982.

[166] Ann Mosely Lesch, "Sudan's foreign policy: In search of arms, aid, and allies," in Sudan: State and society in crisis, ed. John O. Voll, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 49-50.

[167] Richards, 8.

[168] Philip Geyelin, "'Back in his box' went the deterred Qadhafi," International Herald Tribune, 24 February 1983; Charles Richards, "Desert mirage?," Middle East international, no. 157 (4 September 1983), 8.

Nimitz along the Libyan coast.[169] Egypt moved its own reinforcements towards the southwest border, and Egyptian jets soon intercepted Libyan aircraft violating Egyptian airspace near Owainat.[170] In conjunction with Washington, Egypt reportedly planned an entrapment operation that would provide a pretext for strikes against Libya, but was forced to abort the project because of press leaks in the United States.[171]

Faced with a resolute Egypt buttressed by the United States, Qaddafi's forces stood down, only to mount a surprise attack the following year. In March 1984, a Libyan bomber attacked an anti-Libyan radio station at Omdurman. Far from intimidating Khartoum, the attack drove the Egyptians and Sudanese closer together. Egypt and Sudan, having signed a mutual defence pact in 1976, placed their forces on alert and the Egyptian Defence Minister, Field Marshal Abu Ghazala, flew to Khartoum for consultations.

Libya's eventual conciliation with Sudan was brought about by serendipity. In April 1985 Numeiri was deposed in a coup d'etat. As a foe of the Numeiri government, Libya found it easy to befriend the new regime and eventually derived some benefit from the relationship by using Sudan's Darfur province as a staging ground for

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[169] Walter Mossberg and Gerald Seir, "U.S. sends four AWACs planes to Egypt and moves carrier to North African coast," The Wall Street Journal, 17 February 1983.

[170] Richards, 8.

[171] Eilts, 131.

operations in Chad. On the whole, however, Tripoli's relations with Khartoum were not handled with a great deal of diplomatic acumen.

The Western Front: Tunisia and Algeria

Tripoli was not particularly effective at securing its western front either. Algiers resented Qaddafi's influence on the Polisario (which gave the rebels a degree of autonomy from Algerian control) and was suspicious of Qaddafi's overtures to the Touaregs of southern Algeria (where Libya still claimed a substantial parcel of Algerian territory). Tunisia, still smarting from the Gafsa episode and exasperated by its own geographical dispute with Libya, also eyed Tripoli with suspicion. Thus, in 1983 the two concluded a treaty of friendship and pledged to assist each other should a third party (i.e., Libya) attack either.

Formation of a Tunis-Algiers axis was a dismal indicator of the efficacy of Libyan national security policy. Far from rallying his neighbors to his standard, Qaddafi had united them against him just as he had united Egypt and Sudan. Qaddafi tried to undo the damage by applying to become a party to the treaty, a proposal which Algeria and Tunisia promptly rejected. Mauritania, in contrast, was admitted the following year. This so angered Qaddafi that he immediately infiltrated a team of commandos into Tunisia where they blew up an oil

pipeline.[172]

This expression of pique undoubtedly reinforced Tunisia's conviction that it had been wise to ally itself with Algeria, and left Tripoli with few policy options except forming a counter-alliance with Rabat. Thus, after a quick visit to Morocco, Qaddafi suspended military aid to the Polisario in June 1984.[173] On August 13, 1984, Libya and Morocco concluded the Treaty of Oujda, thereby establishing a rival alliance: the Arab-African Union.

In every regard, the Arab-African Union was an exemplary piece of *realpolitik*. Setting aside years of enmity, Libya acquired a reasonably potent ally with which to balance the Algerian-Tunisian entente. Furthermore, the compact brought savory fringe benefits: Morroco gave its blessing to Libya's war in Chad and repatriated Libyan dissidents to whom he had granted asylum. Finally, there was even a chance that King Hassan could intervene on Qaddafi's behalf with the United States.

For all of these reasons, the Libyan-Moroccan partnership made strategic sense. Yet it was not long before the alliance began to buckle under the weight of Qaddafi's world view. The logic of balance of power

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[172] In January, 1984. See Deeb, 153; FBIS MEA 10 January 1984, Q3.

[173] Antonio Marquina, "Libya, the Maghreb and Mediterranean security," in Prospects for security in the Mediterranean, ed. Robert O'Neill, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988), 24.

politics could not induce Qaddafi to tolerate King Hassan's comparatively friendly relations with Israel. When the King met with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in July 1986, Qaddafi accused him of treason. Consequently, in August 1986, Morocco unilaterally abrogated the treaty of friendship. Shortly thereafter Morocco accused Libya of attempting to foment insurrection in the kingdom and recalled its ambassador.[174]

This left Tripoli with three wary and potentially hostile neighbors on its Western frontier. In early 1985 the Libyan Air Force violated Algerian airspace near Djanet in the disputed Ghat region. When Algiers complained about the incursions, Qaddafi retorted that the border was artificial. Taking Qaddafi at his word, Algerian troops took up positions 40km inside Libyan territory.[175] Despite Libyan diplomatic entreaties, the Algerians were determined to cure the Colonel of his casual disregard for borders. By the summer of 1987 Algerian units maintained positions just six kilometers from Ghat.[176]

Tunisia also took a more threatening posture in the aftermath of the Gafsa incident, and gave at least tacit support to a 1984 assault on Qaddafi's headquarters by

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[174] Ronen, 518.

[175] "Libya: Taming the shrew," Africa Confidential 26, no. 15 (17 July 1985): 6.

[176] "Libya: Looking for friends," Africa Confidential 28, no. 16 (5 August 1987): 5.

the National Front for the Salvation of Libya.[177] Tripoli retaliated with a wave of harassment. Libyan border police took three Tunisian border guards hostage, and Libyan military units allegedly violated the Tunisian border at least twice.[178] In 1985 Libya expelled some 30,000 Tunisian workers; Tunis retaliated by expelling 235 Libyans for spying. Qaddafi's hostile rhetoric served to set the stage for Bourguiba's June 1985 visit to Washington.[179]

The warming of U.S.-Tunisian relations was the last thing the Colonel wanted to see, which made his actions all the more remarkable since they made such a warming inevitable. A few months after Bourguiba returned from Washington, the Libyan air force conducted at least two overt reconnaissance flights along the 50km road leading from the Libyan-Tunisian border to Tunis--the route an invasion force would follow to seize the Tunisian capital.[180] Tunisia was put on military alert, and elements of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and Algerian navy were

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[177] Even with Tunisian support, the NFSL lacked the resources to conduct such an operation without outside aid. The most plausible explanation is that the attack was organized by France's Direction de la Sécurite Extérieure, in response to Qaddafi's policies in Chad (Seymour Hersh, "Target Qaddafi," New York Times Magazine, 22 February 1987).

[178] Mark Tessler, "Libya in the Maghreb: The union with Morocco and related developments," in The green and the black, ed. Rene Lemarchand, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 86; see also Francois Burgat, "Qadhafi's 'unitary' doctrine," in the same volume, 27.

[179] Abdel-Wahab Hechiche, "Conflict and resolution in Libyan-Tunisian relations," The Maghreb review 14, no. 1-2 (1989): 65.

[180] FBIS, 12 September 1985.

promptly sent to guard Tunis, and Mubarak publicly warned Libya not to invade.[181] Qaddafi declared a 24-hour helicopter alert along the border, mobilized his patrol aircraft to guard against a pre-emptive attack, and ordered the Libyan army to reinforce its ground units along the Tunisian border in preparation for battle.[182]

Qaddafi's orders triggered an unprecedented result. Libyan units, convinced that their leader was about to recklessly embroil them in a pointless battle with Tunisia (and perhaps Algeria and the United States), refused to deploy. This was, so far is as known in the open literature, the first time that Qaddafi ever faced the possibility of widespread mutiny in the LAF, and it clearly jarred him. In the absence of institutional and political constraints on his leadership it took the threat of rebellion to bring the Colonel to heel. Qaddafi countermanded his order and the crisis evaporated--yet not before Tunisia had broken diplomatic relations, both Washington and Paris had reaffirmed their commitment to Tunisian security, and the Algerians had shown their annoyance.

The costs of extremism

Thus, both in its relations with the superpowers and in its pursuit of regional security, Libyan policy was

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[181] "Tunisia on military alert for attack by Libya," New York Times, 23 August 1985; Eilts, 132.

[182] NFSL Newsletter no. 41, (August-September 1985): 4.

essentially self-defeating. This was, for the most part, because of the extremist tactics--including terrorism--Qaddafi adopted in the pursuit of short term interests at the expense of his strategic goals.

There are doubtlessly many who accept Qaddafi's argument that the Reagan administration's Libya policy--especially the raids on Tripoli and Benghazi--was tantamount to 'state terrorism' and that this was the moral equivalent of Libya's support for organizations such as the Abu Nidal group, the Japanese Red Army, and the Bader-Meinhof gang. The infamous 'Carlos' not only found refuge in Tripoli but referred to the Libyans as his 'bosses.'[183] Dubious though this argument may be, it easily obscures what for the student of international relations are the truly salient points about the drift of Libyan national security policy into the realm of extremism. These are: first, that Libya became an overt and unusually active supporter of terrorist groups in defiance of international norms; second, that this support did not help Tripoli to achieve its strategic objectives, and in many instances produced the opposite effect; and third, that, deservedly or not, Libya acquired a reputation for extremism that itself became a handicap to Tripoli.

Space permits but the briefest exposition of Libya's extremist activities, an egregious example of which

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[183] David Holden and Richard Johns, The house of Saud (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981), 436.

occurred in November 1984 when Egyptian intelligence received word that a Libyan hit-team was en route to Cairo to assassinate former Libyan Prime Minister (and now dissident). The Egyptians prepared an elaborate deception, arresting the would-be killers and staging a false assassination, pictures of which were sent on the news wires to Tripoli. Duped, Qaddafi claimed responsibility for the mission--only to be humiliated by the intended victim's re-emergence. Libya was excoriated by Egypt and the international community.

Only a few months previously the world had been stunned by a series of mine attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea which damaged at least eighteen ships. After assembling a long chain of incriminating evidence, experts fingered a Libyan merchant ship, the Ghat, as the probable culprit.[184] As was to be expected, Tripoli vigorously proclaimed its innocence. But the regime's protests were undermined by Qaddafi's own words. Only a few years earlier Libyan radio urged Palestinian commandos to target their assaults on oil installations and strategic access points to the Red Sea:

> He (Qaddafi) said the Arab Suez Canal must be sabotaged because it had become, under the regime of treacherous Sadat, an (oil) artery which fed the enemy . . . he said this would be a legitimate action in the eyes of the world.[185]

Furthermore, following the mining incident Qaddafi

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[184] John Moore, "Red Sea mines a mystery no longer," Jane's Naval Review 1985, 64-67.

[185] SWB ME/6286 A/2, 1 December 1979.

boasted in a telex to the Ayatollah Khomeini that he was 'pleased and content' with the Red Sea operation. In December 1984, those who served on the Ghat, including two alleged Libyan intelligence officers, were formally decorated for their service--an unusual honor for the crew of a supposedly innocent merchantman.[186]

Assuming that Libya was indeed responsible for the Red Sea mining, what was the operation's utility as a policy instrument? Mining the Red Sea did not appreciably contribute to Libya's security; nor, aside from a brief spike in oil prices, did it inflict much harm upon the regime's enemies. Rather, to a considerable extent the mining operation seemingly justified American policy. European governments, though some feigned uncertainty about Libya's responsibility, had to admit that these attacks--which came without warning and were directed at noncombatants--posed an egregious threat to international security.[187] Thus, the irony of the Red Sea mining operation was that the multilateral minesweeping task force dispatched to clean up the mess served to strengthen the North Atlantic Alliance. In addition, the mine attacks led the CIA to

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[186] Moore, 66.

[187] West Germany was particularly indulgent of Tripoli. When Libyan diplomats posted to Bonn kidnapped and tortured a Libyan student in the ambassador's residence, Libya took 12 Germans hostage and swapped them for the accused diplomats and another Libyan sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering a dissident ("8 Germans freed for Libyans," New York Times, 16 May 1983).

'intensify' its efforts to find Libya's vulnerabilities.[188]

Strange though the Red Sea mining was, it was not the strangest example of a security policy gone amuck to surface that year. On April 17, 1984, 70 members of the Libyan opposition staged a protest outside the People's Bureau in St. James' Square. Qaddafi had instructed the Bureau to 'use all means to go after stray dogs and turn Britain into hell if stray dogs go ahead with demonstrations.'[189] A gunman within the Bureau opened fire on the demonstrators, wounding eleven and killing Woman Police Constable (WPC) Yvonne Fletcher. British authorities demanded that the gunman be surrendered and stripped of diplomatic immunity. Libya refused, calling the demonstration a staged provocation and accusing the British of opening fire.[190] A Libyan mob besieged the British embassy in Tripoli, suggesting that Libya would take hostages if necessary to end the crisis. After ten days, Britain broke diplomatic relations and the Libyan diplomats--including the gunman--were expelled.

The murder of WPC Fletcher displayed a stupefying disregard for international norms, a disregard which cost Libya its diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom, deepened its international pariah status, and endowed the

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[188] Gates, 322.

[189] Apparently a deciphered cable. See Gates, 322.

[190] "The siege of St James's square," Jamahiriya Review, no. 47 (May-June 1984): 8.

Libyan opposition with new legitimacy. The gains to Libya, if any, were negligible. One observer found it 'almost inconceivable' that the Colonel would order such a myopic act of terrorism.[191] Indeed, by any rational standard authorizing or tolerating such counterproductive behavior would have been inconceivable, but the shooting fit all too well into a pattern of irrational behavior.

The break in diplomatic relations was overdue, as Libya had long been agitating against British interests. Tripoli, for example, shipped anti-aircraft missiles to Argentina during the Falklands War.[192] Moreover, Libya's support of the IRA was a matter of record. In 1984 authorities intercepted the Marita Ann carrying three tons of Libyan weapons bound for the IRA. In 1986, Tripoli funnelled an estimated $3 million to the IRA, and dozens of cached rifles stamped with Libyan markings were discovered in Ireland the same year.[193] On October 31, 1987, French authorities discovered 150 tonnes of Libyan arms in the hold of the ship Eskund, along with three known IRA members. After reviewing the evidence, intelligence sources concluded that three other shipments of similar size had been delivered to the IRA

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[191] George Henderson, "Murder in the square," Middle East International, no. 224 (4 May 1984): 5.

[192] Harris, 103.

[193] George Henderson, "Arms for the IRA," Middle East International no. 313, (21 November 1987): 13.

undetected.[194] Both the quantity and nature of the weapons seized gave tangible evidence of Qaddafi's desire to take revenge on England for its supporting role in the 1986 bombings.

All states are free to flaunt international norms of behavior, yet small states are rarely free to do so with impunity. Libya, which for much of its existence escaped the consequences of its more extreme behaviors (for reasons previously noted) now reaped those consequences in the form of broken alliances, severed relations and military reprisals. By the end of 1988, Libya had become indelibly associated with terrorism in the minds of millions. This association was of no small political consequence, as governments contemplating diplomatic or military sanctions against a regime so stigmatized faced a significantly lower political threshold.

Conclusion

The heavily personalized and politicized nature of Libya's conflict with the United States during the Reagan years makes any study of this era inherently controversial. Whether Qaddafi's policies were morally good or bad, justified or not, is immaterial to this thesis. For our purposes, the pivotal questions are whether they were rational, whether they moved Qaddafi closer to achieving his major political objectives, and

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[194] E.A. Wayne, "IRA reported to get huge arms shipment from Libya," Christian Science Monitor, 27 November 1987.

whether they made Libya more secure.

As our cursory survey of the historical record reveals, the answers to these questions are negative. Qaddafi survived his tussles with the Reagan administration, but survival alone was not much of an accomplishment when measured against Qaddafi's agenda. The Colonel failed to reach any of his core security objectives and failed even to achieve most of his intermediate goals.

Qaddafi set out to weaken U.S. influence in the Mediterranean region and specifically, to exert control over the Gulf of Sirte; U.S. influence increased and the American navy, after handing the Libyan armed forces a series of defeats, decided to permanently station a second aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean.[195] He sought security assurances from the Soviet Union; he received none. He tried to induce Egypt to renege on the Camp David Accords; Egypt refused. He sought, through intimidation and subversion, to split the Egyptian-Sudanese alliance; instead, he drove Cairo and Khartoum closer together until Numeiri was deposed by internal forces. He tried to persuade or coerce a number of European and North African states into breaking relations with Washington; none did. He tried and failed to prevent a Tunisian-Algerian alliance, after which he formed but could not sustain an alliance with Morocco.

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[195] Jed C. Snyder, Defending the Fringe: NATO, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press and the Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, 1987), 15.

Finally, he turned to extremism in order to solve the problems that his conventional policy instruments could not rectify; extremism merely aggravated his security predicament.

Returning to a theme invoked in the beginning of this chapter, the advent of an overtly hostile American administration presented Tripoli with an evolutionary challenge. Qaddafi's response--to directly confront the United States--was a classic example of maladaptation. As Secretary of Defense Weinberger reflected:

> Qaddafi had tried by overt attacks, intimidation, threats and bluster, to assert control over international waters. He failed each time. When he saw that he could not accomplish his aim overtly, he then tried the covert use of terrorism. Here our response to him was so immediate and so devastating . . . that by the end of 1986 his credibility was virtually non-existent.[196]

By pitting his lone Third World state against what was arguably the most powerful polity in the international community, Qaddafi strained against the impediments of strategic reality. In the end, he could not escape them.

Moreover, one cannot help observing that Qaddafi had been the catalyst which allowed Reagan to break the 'Vietnam syndrome.' Reagan's adviser Ed Meese observed:

> The Libyan episode of 1981 was the first time President Reagan authorized the use of military forces in defense of U.S. interests . . . His message was loud and clear: No longer could Third World despots challenge the United States and depend on America's post-Vietnam guilt complex, or its uncertainty about its global

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[196] Weinberger, 200-201.

role, to bind our hands.[197]

That Qaddafi was the inadvertent agent of American resurgence was the ultimate irony.

In nature, the price of failed adaptation is extinction. In the international environment the consequences are generally less drastic. They are, nevertheless, real. For Libya, the price of its irrational national security policy was isolation--an isolation that would significantly inhibit the regime's ability to adjust to future changes in its environment. As we shall see in the following chapter, such changes were not long in appearing. The waning Cold War and ensuing reshuffling of the world order ushered in an era in which Libyan national security policy would finally collapse under the weight of Qaddafi's leadership.

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[197] Edwin Meese III, With Reagan: The inside story, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992), 204.

Chapter 4

Denouement:
The Jamahiriyah in the New World Order, 1989-1995

In truth, there is no logic anymore.
We have reached an unreasonable state.

-- Muammar El Qaddafi[1]

Libyans heaved a collective sigh of relief as the Reagan presidency drew to an end. Reagan had proven a formidable antagonist, by far the most dangerous Tripoli had encountered. Naturally, many hoped that the changing of the president would produce a relaxation of tensions and a concomitant increase in security. This, unfortunately, was not the case. Trenchant forces were rippling through the global system in the late 1980s, forces that were far more formidable than any single leader. These forces ushered in a new world order--an order marked by the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the decisive Western victory in the Gulf War. The new order was not kind to its discontents. Freed from the shackles of bi-polar conflict, the G-7 powers--led by the United States--were suddenly able to use international institutions to unprecedented effect, bringing diplomatic, economic, and occasionally military pressure to bear against recalcitrant states they deemed

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[1] BBC Summary of World Broadcats (SWB) ME/0362 A/1, 19 January 1989.

threats to international peace and security.[2] For these so-called 'rogue states' the pre-eminent security challenge of the day was to prevent this new order from subjecting them to containment, encroaching upon their sovereignty, and even in some instances from replacing their regimes.

Cataclysmic change of this type can be usefully conceptualized in biological terms; indeed, the unremitting hostility of the international environment (as Hobbes conceived it) is not unlike nature itself.[3] To flourish, states must mimic the adaptability of living organisms: they must recognize critical changes in their surroundings and devise appropriate responses. Such adaptations tax the abilities of even the ablest leaders and, as in nature, many fail the evolutionary test. The new international order was soon strewn with leaders (in Panama, Haiti, Cuba, North Korea and Iraq) thoroughly discombobulated by their unfamiliar environment.

It was thus through no unique failing of his own that the Libyan leader, who had not fared particularly well under the previous order, was unable to keep pace with the rapid permutations in the international system--most of which, he realized, were inimical to his interests. Qaddafi's anxiety became particularly acute

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[2] See Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Anthony Lake's article "Confronting backlash states," Foreign Affairs 73, no. 2 (March-April 1994): 45-55.

[3] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), Chapter XXI.

after events such as the U.S. invasion of Panama, which--in Tripoli's eyes--set:

> a serious precedent in international relations at a time when the world is witnessing transformations and changes in the balances of power which consolidate tendencies towards aggression rather than provide opportunities for repelling them.[4]

Though they caused obvious discomfort, these 'transformations and changes' had a salubrious impact upon Libyan decision-making. To the extent that the new world order held Qaddafi to account, he adopted pragmatic and, at times, eminently rational policies: he attempted to repair his damaged relations with Egypt, the Maghrib, and the West; he renounced terrorism; he finally abandoned his designs on Chad; and he even flirted with the idea of making peace with Israel.

However, sustaining these initiatives required a flexibility that Qaddafi did not possess. His world view remained constant; hence, his more rational policies were ultimately discredited by displays of hostility. Moreover, states that had been on the receiving end of Qaddafi's less irenic policies over the preceding decades were not only dubious of the Colonel's reformation, but content to see him flounder in the new order. Years of antagonistic behavior had thus created a gravity well from which Qaddafi could not escape.

The consequences for Libyan national security were little short of disastrous. Unable to retain even a

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[4] SWB ME/0712/A/8, 14 March 1990.

minimal level of Soviet patronage, Tripoli became more isolated than ever. Outmaneuvered at the United Nations, Libya sank into ignominious economic and military stagnation under a sanctions regimen. Checked by international vigilance, Libyan proliferation programs (Qaddafi's last hope for elevating his standing in the global pecking order) sputtered inconclusively, occasionally drawing threats of American pre-emption. By mid-decade, the Libyan security predicament was more acute, and its leader further from seeing his international agenda realized, than at any time since the fateful September morning in 1969 when Muammar El Qaddafi toppled the Sanusi throne.

Libya, the end of the Cold War, and the fall of the Soviet Union

As explained in the preceding chapter, by the late 1980s Libya had become marginal to Soviet interests. Moscow's waning interest in Tripoli was checked only by the instinct of a Great Power to preserve its clients, no matter how small, and by the highly profitable tradition of supplying Libya with armaments it could not absorb. To facilitate these arms sales the Kremlin tossed Qaddafi the occasional bone. For example, on June 5, 1990, Defence Minister Dmitri Yazov persuaded the Soviet Central Committee to share satellite intelligence on

Sixth Fleet activities with the LAF.[5] This was perhaps more to keep Libya out of trouble than to facilitate Libyan defence planning.

Tripoli's estrangement from Moscow was vividly underscored by the superpower summit held at Malta in December 1989 (only a few weeks after the Berlin Wall crumbled). Qaddafi watched in bleak despair as George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev closed a chapter in history scarcely a stone's throw from Libyan waters.[6] Whereas most nations were relieved by this evidence of the Cold War's end, Qaddafi decried the summit as an 'ugly affair' and even denounced the choice of venue as 'a kind of naval muscle-flexing.'[7]

Scarcely had Bush and Gorbachev finished meeting before the Soviet Union began to buckle under the weight of massive inefficiency and the unfamiliar domestic pressures generated by *glasnost*. In less than two years the USSR would no longer exist.

Well before the Soviet Union finished its implosion Tripoli realized it could no longer rely upon Soviet aid. Publicly, Qaddafi tried to be generous in his assessments of Gorbachev. *Perestroyka*, he said, 'was undoubtedly prescribed by the Third Universal Theory' (perhaps the

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[5] Jonathan Lyons, "Gorbachev's party provided secret help for Gaddafi," Times, 29 July 1992.

[6] Gorbachev confidently told Bush: 'strategically and philosophically, the way of the Cold War has been defeated.' James Baker, The politics of diplomacy, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995): 170.

[7] SWB ME/0607 i, 7 November 1989.

highest praise Qaddafi could lavish on any foreign ideology).[8] Even the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel was generally spared direct criticism; instead, Qaddafi denounced the United States for pressuring the Soviets to allow such emigration.[9] Beneath the surface, however, Qaddafi was dismayed by what he felt was Gorbachev's betrayal of his 'revolutionary' responsibilities. Time and again he tried to prod or coax the USSR into action, visibly struggling to maintain his faith:

> I am sympathetic to the Soviet Union now, because the defeat of the Soviet Union is a victory of one kind or another for US imperialism. . . . In fact, it would be in our interest if the Soviet Union were not to fall and were not defeated. It must remain strong as a world force to deter America. However, if this does not materialise, we shall work for the creation of an international deterrent.[10]

By 'international deterrent' Qaddafi meant, as he always had, a force that would enable him to pursue his political objectives with impunity.

The Soviet putsch of August 1991 therefore occasioned heartfelt relief and much giddy applause in Libya. Qaddafi himself publicly hailed the conspirators. Alas, the Colonel's exuberance produced a rather dramatic chill in relations once Gorbachev reasserted himself. Qaddafi tried to paper over the damage by claiming his

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[8] SWB ME/0662 A/4, 15 January 1990. With hindsight, of course, Qaddafi would later assert that the collapse of the USSR was predicted by the same theory (Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Gadhafi: 'Why is Libya being punished?,'" Washington Times, 6 July 1993).

[9] SWB ME/0688 A/1, 14 February 1990.

[10] SWB ME/0735/A/6, 10 April 1990.

support of the conspirators had been a 'political stance . . . not an ideological one,' and by sending a treacly telegram to Gorbachev hailing the 'strategic friendship' between their states.[11] His apologies met only icy silence from Moscow. Realizing the damage was already done, Qaddafi candidly expressed his disillusionment with Soviet patronage:

> Someone could come along and say that, through this stand (welcoming the putsch) we have lost the Soviet Union. We lost the Soviet Union a long time ago . . . When they (the Americans) struck us in 1986, was it conceivable that 170 planes were roaring up in skies about 4,000 miles, and the Soviet Union was unaware of them or was not following them by the hour and by the minute? . . . I wish they had told us: Qadhafi, listen, there is going to be an attack on your children by 170 planes, after one or two hours they will reach you. . . they did not say even these things. . . We were unaware of anything (until) the bombs were dropping on us. . . Therefore, we had lost the Soviet Union a long time ago.[12]

The Colonel's statement held considerable truth. However, it was one thing to recognize that the Soviet-Libyan relationship was slipping, and quite another to push it over the precipice. Qaddafi's reckless praise of the Soviet hardliners stripped Tripoli of the last vestiges of Soviet goodwill. In the words of one Russian diplomat, bilateral relations were 'drastically lowered.'[13] The Soviet navy, for example, discontinued

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[11] SWB ME/1167/A/9-11, 3 September 1991.

[12] SWB ME/1167/A/11, 3 September 1991.

[13] Alexei Vassiliev, Russian policy in the Middle East: From messianism to pragmatism, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 289.

joint naval exercises with the Libyan fleet.[14]

The dissolution of the USSR gave Qaddafi an opportunity to seek better relations with its successor states, notably Russia. But Russian-Libyan relations were soon marred by a serious economic dispute.[15] At the beginning of 1992 Libya stopped making payments to Russia on its military debt, ostensibly because Tripoli questioned whether Russia should be entitled to debts contracted with the Soviet Union. In reality, Libya was distressed by Russia's support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 731 (January 21, 1992); withholding payments was thus an expression of displeasure and an attempt to dissuade Russia from acquiescing to the imposition of sanctions as well. As a secondary objective, Tripoli perhaps hoped to gain some leverage to renegotiate its payment schedule. Tripoli definitely regarded its payments to Moscow as a policy lever; it is interesting to note that Libya first began delaying payments on its debt to Moscow after the 1986 bombings in apparent protest of the USSR's inaction.[16]

Qaddafi's diplomatic fillip failed to spur Russia into taking a more active line in Libya's defence, in part because Tripoli ignored Moscow's advice to avoid a

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[14] The Middle East Military Balance 1992-1993 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 313.

[15] Libya's foreign reserves were dwindling so rapidly that the General People's Congress demanded strict controls to stop the 'hemorrhage of foreign currency' (SWB ME/0726/a/1, 30 March 1990).

[16] Vassiliev, 286.

protracted confrontation with the Security Council. Thus, when in March 1992 the Security Council imposed sanctions on Tripoli, Moscow supported the resolution rather than use its veto on Libya's behalf or abstain from the vote. Outraged, Qaddafi set fire to the few remaining bridges with his former friend. On April 2 a 'mob' attacked the Russian embassy in Tripoli, an old tactic that the Libyans had previously employed on the French, Americans, and British. On April 22, President Yeltsin--in accordance with the Security Council resolution--froze all arms sales to Libya, ordered reductions in diplomatic representation, and ordered the withdrawal of all Russian military advisers from Libya.[17] Tripoli did not accept Yeltsin's decision gracefully and, according to the Russian embassy, deliberately hampered the departure.[18]

Relations with the Yeltsin government gradually thawed, though this was primarily due to Russia's internal dynamics rather than to any adroit diplomacy on Qaddafi's part. As Russia's economic problems multiplied in the post-Soviet era, Moscow became increasingly sensitive to suggestions that its Great Power status had fallen into abeyance. Moscow therefore grumbled about

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[17] According to the Russian press, some 200 of the estimated 3000 advisers accepted contracts to remain as private consultants, at salaries many times greater than their army pay. John Hannah, "Russia and the Middle East," in Middle East Contemporary Survey 1992, ed. Ami Ayalon, vol. XVI, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 53-54.

[18] Radio Moscow, 14 June 1992.

tightening UN sanctions on Libya in 1993, with some newspapers arguing that additional sanctions would make it even more difficult for Tripoli to service its $3 billion dollar military debt (which Libya still refused to pay). Unfortunately for Qaddafi, Tripoli simply did not have the diplomatic or economic muscle to capitalize on Russia's misgivings.

In contrast, U.S. President Bill Clinton, British Prime Minister John Major, and French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur each weighed in with President Yeltsin, warning that a Russian veto would jeopardize the flow of Western economic aid. Yeltsin wisely, if reluctantly, capitulated. The ease with which the Western powers nullified Tripoli's best hope of reprieve was a striking illustration of the power disparity between Libya and the states it had willfully antagonized.[19]

Libya in a uni-polar world

The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered a revised Cold War eschatology: whereas it was once understood that the Cold War had ended by mutual assent, the West, and more particularly the United States, now claimed unilateral victory. Whatever the mythology, it was certainly clear that the United States enjoyed--at least for a time--a unique position as the preeminent global

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[19] Mark Tran, "Moscow falls in step over new Lockerbie sanctions," Guardian, 5 November 1993; Middle East Economic Digest (12 November 1993): 13; and author's interviews with U.S. officials.

power. For pariah states, the consequences of American preeminence were swift. Deprived of a unitary threat (and realizing it would be impolitic to fully articulate fears of Russian resurgence or Chinese emergence), the U.S. national security establishment re-ordered its agenda. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism topped the revised hierarchy of threats.[20] In American eyes, Libya had the dubious honor of qualifying on both counts.[21]

Libya's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction was a wholly predictable expression of the regime's pursuit of national security, albeit one that was not distinguished by great success. Following the 1986 bombings, Qaddafi recognized that he could no longer rely upon his conventional forces to protect him from the repercussions of his policies.[22] Moreover, he made it abundantly clear that he believed the Arabs suffered a strategic deficiency with regards to Israel and the United States

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[20] The White House, A national security strategy of engagement and enlargement, (Washington, D.C.: February 1995): 8.

[21] 'Libya's rogue regime (is) engaged in both terrorist and proliferation activities.' Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, United States Security Strategy for the Middle East, (Washington, D.C.: May 1995): 26.

[22] For an explicit admission of this, see SWB ME/11667/A/9, 3 September 1991. Perhaps it was recognition of this fact which prompted Qaddafi two years earlier to make the unprecedented statement that Libya 'had enough' conventional weapons (SWB ME/0598 A/2, 27 October 1989).

which the acquisition of WMD would remedy.[23] Libya, Qaddafi said, would have retaliated against New York with ballistic missiles in 1986 if it had possessed the capability.[24]

Qaddafi's numerous (but fruitless) attempts to obtain nuclear weapons are well known and need little comment.[25] Dismayed by the difficulties of mounting an indigenous nuclear weapons program, the Libyan regime instead turned to the development of chemical weapons (CW) in the early 1980s.[26] By the end of the Reagan presidency, this covert proliferation program was on the verge of entering large scale production.[27]

Qaddafi's dealings with the Bush administration were thus troubled by proliferation from the outset. Only days before the 1989 Presidential inauguration, the White House was mulling a pre-emptive air strike to prevent Pharma-150 (the Libyan chemical weapons plant at Rabta)

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[23] See, for example, the Colonel's ruminations on the utility of ballistic missiles in this regard (SWB ME/0584/A/2, 11 October 1989).

[24] SWB ME/0745/A/2, 23 April 1990.

[25] John Cooley, "Qaddafi's great aim for Libya is a nuclear capability of its own," Christian Science Monitor, 12 November 1980.

[26] An excellent introduction to Libyan CW is Thomas Wiegele's The clandestine building of Libya's chemical weapons factory, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).

[27] The Reagan administration first leaked its concern in late 1987. See Michael Gordon, "U.S. thinks Libya may plan to make chemical weapons," New York Times, 24 December 1987.

from entering full-scale production.[28] Less contemptuous of American military might after the experiences of 1986, Qaddafi had to devise a means of either protecting Pharma-150 or mollifying the Americans.

Whether through shrewd calculation or serendipity (or both), Qaddafi hit upon the right solution. On January 4, 1989, fighters from the USS John F. Kennedy intercepted two inbound Libyan Mig-23s on a 'routine reconnaissance patrol' some 145 km north of Tobruk (an area claimed by Libya as restricted airspace but not recognized as such by the international community).[29] The Libyan pilots opened fire but missed the American aviators, who shot down both Libyan jets.

If Qaddafi's intent in sanctioning yet another attack on the Sixth Fleet were to reassert his claim to the Gulf of Sirte, his gambit failed. But if, as seems likely, Qaddafi was in effect sacrificing a pawn to the American armada in the expectation that this would stave off an attack on Rabta, the ploy worked admirably. Though one might have expected the United States to seize upon this incident as a pretext for launching a pre-emptive strike on the Rabta site, it was evident to Washington that its European allies would not support such an action; the Reagan White House was partly to blame since the exposure of an ill-conceived

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[28] SWB ME/0352/A/1, 7 January 1989; SWB ME/0353/A/1, 9 January 1989.

[29] SWB ME/0353/A/1, 9 January 1989.

disinformation campaign against Tripoli had greatly discredited the administration's Libya policy. The Pentagon therefore declared the incident closed and the Sixth Fleet withdrew, 'not because they were matched by a Libyan military force but because of the strength of the international stand,' as Qaddafi observed.[30] The loss of two aircraft was thus a small price for protecting the strategic chemical works at Rabta.[31]

Qaddafi took logical steps to ensure that the crisis was defused. On January 13, he returned the body of Paul Lorence, an American pilot killed in Operation El Dorado Canyon, to the United States through the good offices of the Vatican.[32] In addition, Tripoli heaped surreal flattery on the new American president and Qaddafi appealed for face-to-face negotiations with America.[33] The offer to enter negotiations was immediately reiterated by Foreign Minister Jadallah Azzuz Al Talhi: 'We are ready for dialogue . . . and awaiting the response of the new U.S. administration.'[34] For several

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[30] SWB ME/0360/A/7, 17 January 1989.

[31] Intriguingly, Libya's CW program remained almost inert for the remainder of this period. In 1993 Qaddafi hinted that he saw the program as a bargaining chip: 'By forging new links with us, you (the United States) will be in a much better position to influence our policy, especially regarding chemical weapons' (de Borchgrave, op. cit.).

[32] SWB ME/0359/A/3, 16 January 1989.

[33] Without a trace of irony, Qaddafi even offered the White House some public relations advice: 'America . . . should try during the Bush era to brighten up its image' (SWB ME/0353/A/5, 9 January 1989).

[34] SWB ME/0427i, 6 April 1989.

months Tripoli continued declaring its interest in normalizing relations and hailed the decrease in tensions brought about by Bush's 'rich political experience.'[35]

This conciliatory tone demonstrated once more that Qaddafi was not incapable of moderation when faced with imminent consequences to his actions. However, when the immediacy of those consequences dissipated he failed to temper his policies long enough to secure any lasting political benefit. Work on Pharma-150 continued unabated, and Libya's General People's Congress defiantly resolved 'to consolidate the defensive capability of the Great Jamahiriyah and to develop programmes of scientific research and strategic industries in order to confront the dangers threatening the Arab motherland' (i.e., to continue its proliferant activities).[36]

Thus, by early 1990 the tensions caused by Rabta were even higher than they had been the year before. In March, just when it appeared that the United States was preparing afresh to pre-emptively attack the chemical weapons factory, Libya announced that Pharma-150 had been destroyed by fire.[37] Tripoli accused various intelligence agencies of sabotaging the plant, although most Western analysts eventually concluded that Tripoli

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[35] SWB ME/0584i, 11 October 1989; SWB ME/0598 A/3, 27 October 1989.

[36] SWB ME/0726/A/1, 30 March 1990. Qaddafi obviously agreed, later insisting that Libya had 'both the potential and the right to build missiles' (de Borchgrave, op. cit.).

[37] The threat of pre-emption was made on numerous occasions. For a synopsis see Wiegele, 31-32.

staged the fire to defuse tensions until Libya's CW machinery could be relocated to less vulnerable sites. Either way, it was clear that Libyan proliferation was increasing the likelihood of renewed military conflict with the West.[38]

Proliferation was just one means by which Tripoli tried to meet the challenge of American pre-eminence in the post Cold-War era. Libya also attempted to drive a wedge between the United States and its European allies. In fact, the General People's Congress instructed the Foreign Ministry to cultivate relations in Western Europe wherever possible to counter Washington's pressure for anti-Libyan measures.[39] France was a natural target for such an effort, since Paris took an independent (and often sympathetic) line toward Tripoli. Qaddafi therefore secured the release of French hostage Jacqueline Valente and her family, who were being held in Lebanon.[40] France rewarded this gesture by returning three Libyan Mirage fighters impounded since 1986. However, the Franco-Libyan thaw came to an abrupt end in September 1990 when Libya was implicated in the destruction of a French passenger jet. So much for Libya's attempt to fracture the Atlantic Alliance.

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[38] A trend that continued into the latter half of the 1990s. See the author's article, "Libyan CW raises the issue of pre-emption," in Jane's Intelligence Review 8, no. 11 (November 1996): 522-526.

[39] SWB ME/0712/A/6, 14 March 1990.

[40] SWB ME/0736i, 11 April 1990.

Rapprochement with Egypt was another sensible move under the circumstances, as it reduced the threat of the United States working in concert with Cairo against Tripoli. But reconciliation was also a capitulation on Libya's part, since Tripoli was forced to abandon its insistence that Cairo renounce the Camp David accords. Qaddafi tried to disguise this fact by claiming that he only agreed to attend the May 1989 Casablanca Summit (which marked Egypt's return to the Arab fold) after being placed under duress by the presidents of Algeria, Syria and Tunisia.[41] Still, it was a 'bitter' experience which Qaddafi likened (in a peculiarly distasteful metaphor) to 'eating a corpse.'[42] As relations between Egypt and Libya warmed, Qaddafi improbably suggested that there had been no capitulation at all. Egypt, he hinted, was secretly dedicated to fighting Israel: 'We have agreed about strategic matters. We have to keep our affairs secret.'[43]

Rapprochement came as a relief to most Libyans. Yet Qaddafi's question called into question the preceding sixteen years of Egypt-bashing. Moreover, by delaying reconciliation until Egypt had already resumed its place in the Arab world Qaddafi had squandered precious diplomatic capital. It soon became apparent which of the

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[41] SWB ME/0464i, 23 May 1989; SWB ME/0465i, 24 May 1989; SWB ME/0779/A/1, 1 June 1990.

[42] SWB ME/0465 A/2-3, 24 May 1989.

[43] SWB ME/0481A/9, 13 June 1989.

two countries needed the other more. Mubarak happily became Qaddafi's broker with the Western world, thereby establishing leverage over Tripoli. By mid-decade, Egypt was widely suspected of prolonging Libya's confrontation with the Security Council for its own advantage.

Libya and the Gulf War

With the chemical proliferation program at least temporarily derailed, Libya's relations with the United States returned to their natural center of gravity. This equilibrium was shattered by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Saddam Hussein's action, Qaddafi realized with horror, would inflate American influence in the Middle East to unprecedented heights:

> We have given to America an historic opportunity so that it directly brings its forces into the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf . . . We have given them an irreplaceable opportunity. An opportunity which they had never expected. An opportunity whereby they will come back any time and say: The Arabian Peninsula? No problem.[44]

In a single stroke, Saddam had set in play forces which could undo everything Qaddafi had tried to accomplish over the preceding two decades.

How to respond to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was thus a question of extreme importance to Tripoli. Theoretically, Qaddafi was obligated to support Iraq. He had, in fact, allied himself with Saddam only a few months before. In May 1990 he pledged 'unlimited'

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[44] SWB ME/0860 A/5, 4 September 1990.

support to Iraq, declaring that 'any attack against Iraq is an attack against Libya . . . the Libyan leadership and people, as well as all of Libya's resources, are at Iraq's disposal.'[45]

On the other hand, Libya had nothing material to gain from joining Iraq in a pitched battle against a Western coalition; Qaddafi had sufficient experience to realize that his forces would be badly mauled in any such conflict. Furthermore, Qaddafi was not willing to stand against Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Qaddafi therefore adopted a position of studied neutrality. Although he was 'undoubtedly siding with Iraq against America,' he disapproved of the invasion of Kuwait.[46] For Qaddafi, the principal issue at stake was not the future of Kuwait but the American military presence in the Middle East. He repeatedly bemoaned the fact that Saddam had given the United States a 'golden opportunity' to permanently station forces in the Persian Gulf.[47] This presence, he believed, would directly impact Libya. Qaddafi warned his countrymen: 'your turn will come if America and its alliance in the Gulf triumphs, they will move to the Mediterranean, to Libya.'[48]

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[45] SWB ME/0760/A/7-8, 10 May 1990.

[46] SWB ME/0860 A/5, 4 September 1990.

[47] SWB ME/0860/A/5, 4 September 1990; SWB ME/0837/A/9, 8 August 1990; SWB ME/0842/A/9, 14 August 1990.

[48] SWB ME/0890 A/9, 9 October 1990.

Eliminating America's involvement in the Gulf conflict therefore became Qaddafi's self-declared policy objective, and Qaddafi became one of several proponents of an 'Arab solution' to the crisis. In a sense, the crisis re-awakened Qaddafi's aspirations to Pan-Arab leadership, insomuch as establishing himself as the mediator of the conflict would catapult the Colonel to the forefront of the Arab world.

Qaddafi therefore expended considerable energy trying to sell the region on his formulas for defusing the gathering storm. He immediately sent his aide, Mustafa Al Kharroubi, to Baghdad to assess Saddam's intent. Then, in his September 1st address, Qaddafi unveiled a unilateral initiative to replace Iraq's forces in Kuwait with non-Western UN forces, replace the American troops in Saudi Arabia with Arab-Muslim forces, to cede Bubiyan island to Iraq and to allow the Kuwaitis to determine their own government.[49] Qaddafi sent Al Kharroubi out again to garner support for the plan in Arab capitals.[50] However, neither side was enthused by the Colonel's proposal.[51] Nevertheless, as late as November Qaddafi tried to broker a meeting between Saddam Hussein and King Fahd.

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[49] SWB ME/0859i, 3 September 1990.

[50] Kharrubi visited Iraq (Sept. 5), Jordan (Sept. 6), Saudi Arabia (Sept. 8), the United Arab Emirates (Sept. 9), Oman and Bahrain (Sept. 10), Qatar (Sept. 11), and Egypt (Sept. 13).

[51] The Saudis, for example, tersely corrected a JANA report that they 'welcomed' Qaddafi's proposal (SWB ME/0866i, 11 September 1990).

The Arab solution never materialized for a number of reasons, the most important of which were Saddam Hussein's ambitions. Saddam, after all, was also using the crisis to depict himself as the champion of the Arab cause and had his own 'peace initiative' to end the crisis.[52] Thus, the Iraqi leader was not about to allow Qaddafi to supplant him as the hero of this drama and deflected the Colonel's fervent diplomacy. Qaddafi finally washed his hands of Baghdad with a declaration that Tripoli was 'no longer concerned about the Gulf problem from far or near, and it will leave the intransigent parties, whether Saudis, Kuwaitis, or Iraqis, to pay the price of their policies.'[53]

Libya's inability to negotiate an Arab solution to the Gulf crisis was also due to Tripoli's antagonization of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. While half-heartedly criticizing the Iraqi invasion, Qaddafi inferred that he saw Kuwait's existence as 'illogical.'[54] In addition, Tripoli abstained from a motion at the emergency Arab League summit on August 10 that condemned Baghdad's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. Moreover, the Libyan leader excoriated the Kuwaitis and Saudis for seeking American aid: 'What are we? Are we a plantation or a herd of sheep? This (Arab) nation from the Ocean to the Gulf

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[52] See Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, The Gulf conflict 1990-1991, (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 95, 101-102.

[53] Speech on Libyan television, 28 November 1990.

[54] SWB ME/0860 A/5, 4 September 1990.

must be respected. To hell with Kuwait.'[55] He went so far as to accuse the Saudis of high treason and declared that the country should no longer be entrusted with the protection of Islam's holy places, Mecca and Medina.[56] Such assertions could scarcely be expected to secure the Gulf Arabs' support for Libyan diplomacy.

Thus, Qaddafi's failure to establish himself as an Arab alternative to American leadership in the Gulf crisis was at least in part due to his own behavior, though one may well question whether a state with Libya's limited leverage could ever have brokered a solution to a conflict between such resolute foes. In any event, the contrast between the overwhelming barrage of power (military, diplomatic, and economic) which Washington brought to bear on Iraq, and the Colonel's inability to influence the course of events, was stark. What is more, the ease with which the Western coalition dissected the Iraqi army (equipped almost identically to Libya's) suggested, disturbingly, that the billions of dollars spent on upgrading the Libyan armed forces had purchased only a slight measure of security. Thus, more than any event since 1969, the Gulf conflict brought into sharp relief the failure of Libya's national security policies to reduce American dominance of the Middle East or, at the very least, to establish Libya as a serious challenger to that dominance.

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[55] SWB ME/0890 A/13, 9 October 1990.

[56] SWB ME/0860 A/7, 4 September 1990.

Lockerbie: A bomb too far

On December 21, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 was blown apart by a terrorist's bomb and fell from the night sky over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. In September 1989, UTA Flight 772 disintegrated over Niger in an identical attack, killing another 170 innocent travellers. Each bombing carried Qaddafi's vengeful signature.[57] The first was a parting shot at Reagan, timed so as not to give the American president time to ascertain Libya's responsibility and mount a punitive operation. The second was intended to punish France for Libya's defeat in Chad.[58]

Vengeance, as we saw in the preceding chapter, was not an atypical motivation for Libyan extremism. It nevertheless remains startling that Qaddafi risked so much on attacks that failed to advance any other demonstrable Libyan interest. Indeed, the lack of an obvious motive initially threw suspicion on Iran, which could have been seeking to avenge the downing of an Iranian passenger plane by the USS Vincennes.

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[57] This thesis admittedly presumes Libya's responsibility for each bombing and considers them elements of Libyan national security policy. Since we are dealing with geostrategic realities rather than points of law, and since space prohibits adequate exposition of the available evidence, this presumption can be defended on the grounds that even if one accepts Libya's innocence, the regime was still responsible for cultivating a reputation which made Tripoli a credible suspect, and thus rendering the state itself vulnerable to UN intervention.

[58] In 1996 Libya all but admitted guilt for the UTA bombing, and even furnished the investigating French magistrate with an exact replica of the bomb used (Charles Trueheart, "Jet sabotage is linked to Gadhafi kin," New York Times, 20 September 1996).

Nevertheless, two years after the Lockerbie bombing American and Scottish prosecutors issued indictments against two alleged Libyan intelligence officers; a French magistrate had previously issued indictments against four other Libyans with regards to the UTA bombing, including Qaddafi's brother-in-law, Abdullah Sannusi. These indictments were greeted by derision from Tripoli, and Libya's scorn engendered speculation that the United States would resort to military retaliation.[59] American F-111s based in Britain ostentatiously practiced precision bombing runs in apparent preparation for just such an operation.[60]

The memory of the 1986 attack was still vivid in Tripoli, but its lessons remained unassimilated. Qaddafi still relied on crude threats to produce a fissure in NATO. For example, he warned Rome and Madrid:

> We will strike Italy and Spain if any attack against Libya was (sic) launched from them . . . these nations must accept full responsibility for what may befall them, if they allow their land to be used to attack Libya or any Arab nation . . . we do not care how many children and women die in Italy or Spain. Their children and their women must die . . . [61]

This type of menacing remark had always been of questionable utility since it tended to convince the Europeans to close ranks with Washington.

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[59] e.g., James DeHart and Jerrold Post, "Responding to Qaddafi," Christian Science Monitor, 7 January 1992.

[60] Geoff Simons, Libya: The struggle for survival (London: Macmillan, 1993), 37.

[61] NFSL Newsreport 8, no. 4 (July-August, 1991): 21.

While Qaddafi was scanning the horizon for another air raid, the United States, France and the United Kingdom were preparing something of far greater consequence. Since terrorism was an assault on the norms of the Westphalian system, their fitting response was to transcend that system altogether. Having used United Nations (UN) sanctions to remarkable effect against Iraq before and after the Gulf War, they now turned this same instrument against Libya by sponsoring a Security Council resolution requiring Libya to make a full and effective response to their respective extradition requests. The Libyan UN delegation was helpless in the face of this diplomatic blitz, and the resolution (731) was adopted on January 21, 1992.

Qaddafi was suddenly staring into a blatant trap. Defiance would likely result in sanctions. Should he honor the extradition demands, he would be caving to the very powers which he had made it his business to defy. At best, he would be humiliated; at worst, the loss of face (and sovereignty) might imperil his hold on power. Moreover, once surrendered the suspects might cooperate with foreign prosecutors and incriminate senior Libyan officials. Better, he concluded, to defy the Security Council and fight a rearguard action against sanctions. Qaddafi thus stepped neatly into the containment trap.

Over the next two months the Anglo-French-American troika mounted a full-court press in the Security Council, overwhelming the best efforts of Libyan

diplomats. On March 31, 1992, the Security Council passed Resolution 748, imposing economic and political sanctions on Libya. Significantly, not a single member of the Security Council--including the sole Arab representative, Libya's one-time ally Morocco--voted against the resolution. This in itself was disheartening for Tripoli, though Qaddafi had only himself to blame (Morocco's position might have been different were it not for Libya's lengthy and generous support of the Polisario). Moreover, Resolution 748 raised the bar Libya would have to clear to end the crisis: 'the Libyan Government must commit itself definitively to cease all forms of terrorist action and all assistance to terrorist groups, and that it must promptly, by concrete actions, demonstrate its renunciation of terrorism.' Obviously, this sweeping clause would allow the Security Council to keep Libya contained indefinitely.

The sanctions themselves were often dismissed as ineffective by those who, oblivious to their overarching geopolitical purpose, viewed them solely as a means of inducing Libya to surrender the Lockerbie suspects. But when seen as instruments of containment (as Qaddafi himself saw them), the sanctions on Libya proved remarkably effective.[62] They were, for example, an especially efficient means of pulling the claws out of the Libyan military. Resolution 748 imposed a comprehensive arms ban on Tripoli, prohibited UN member

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[62] SWB ME/1882 MED/20-22, 30 December 1993.

states from providing advice or training that would assist Libya in circumventing that ban, and required the withdrawal of all foreign military advisers from Libya. These prohibitions were immediately felt by the Libyan military, which was trying to upgrade its defenses in light of Iraq's performance in the Gulf War. For example, Tripoli ordered new surface to air missiles from Russia in February 1992.[63] This order, like all other military contracts, was instantly nullified. Thus, for the first time since 1969 Tripoli was unable to pursue security through the purchase of conventional weapons. While other Arab states re-equipped their forces in accordance with the lessons of the Gulf War, Libya struggled just to maintain its existing weapons.

The influence of these restrictions compounded with time, exacting an ever-higher toll from the LAF. In fact, as Jalloud admitted in November 1992, Libya's forces soon began losing ground as their equipment slid into disrepair:

> Now they have banned spare parts and maintenance, and our defence capability is now being eaten into because of the military sanctions . . . (our weapons) are getting worn out because of the ban on spare parts and maintenance.[64]

By late 1994 the Libyan armed forces were less formidable than at any point in the preceding decade. The nation's air defence system was 'seriously crippled if not

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[63] Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy 22, no. 4 (30 April 1994): 19.

[64] SWB ME/1540/A/1, 17 November 1992.

rendered totally ineffective' by the departure of the Russian specialists who maintained it.[65] The Libyan air force was virtually grounded, its cumulative flying time reduced to an anorexic 85 hours.[66] By mid-decade the navy had been reduced to a collection of 'dock-bound rust buckets.'[67] Finally, the army's armored forces were, in the words of a journalist who witnessed the regime's 25th anniversary celebrations, 'in a shabby state and far from combat ready.'[68]

The Security Council also forced Libya to reduce its diplomatic missions, compounding the regime's isolation and limiting its ability to influence foreign governments, collect intelligence, and conduct covert operations. The accompanying ban on air traffic in and out of Libya meant that only the most determined--and generally least influential--statesmen ventured to Tripoli. Sanctions also carried a real, if exaggerated, economic cost.[69]

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[65] Chris Hedges, "Libyan anger rises over Gadhafi rule," International Herald Tribune, 23 June 1992.

[66] The International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 1995/96, (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140.

[67] Jonathan Landay, "The arms race under the sea," Christian Science Monitor, 27 September 1995; see also the author's "The Libyan threat to the Mediterranean," Jane's Intelligence Review 8, no. 5 (May 1996): 225-26.

[68] Charles Richards, "Libya parades its obsolete weapons of war," Independent, 2 September 1994.

[69] In April 1995 Libya estimated the cost of sanctions at $3.6 billion U.S. dollars. For more on the financial impact of sanctions, see the author's "The Lockerbie endgame," in Journal of North African studies 1, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 84-85.

As months passed and Resolutions 731 and 748 went unheeded, the Security Council gave Libya an ultimatum: comply by October 1, 1993, or face additional sanctions. Qaddafi, who had been dismissive of the first two resolutions, finally awoke to the gravity of his situation. How could he fend off another diplomatic assault? The problem touched off one of the few discernible eruptions of ministerial dissent within the Libyan Cabinet, with some advisers (notably Jalloud and Abdullah Sannusi, who belonged to the same tribe as one of the accused) vehemently opposed to moderation, and others (led by the Foreign Ministry) urging compromise.

Qaddafi's reformation

For once the voices of moderation triumphed. In early 1993 Qaddafi launched a media blitz proclaiming that he had turned over the proverbial leaf: he now wanted warm relations with Washington, eschewed terrorism, and--most startling of all--no longer rejected the idea of making peace with Israel. Furthermore, Qaddafi proposed a series of erstwhile compromises to end the Lockerbie crisis. Though there was never much danger of the UN accepting these 'concessions' (Qaddafi himself quite clearly realizing that the impetus for the Security Council's position was containment, not extradition), the Colonel hoped to persuade the Security Council that he was a man with whom they could do business, and whose past revolutionary excesses should therefore be

overlooked.

The first objective of Qaddafi's reformation was to persuade the White House that Libya was no longer America's enemy. Accordingly, Tripoli sought to curry favor with newly-elected President Bill Clinton, promising never to harm him politically (memories of Billy Carter?) or even annoy him.[70] Indeed, Qaddafi indicated that Clinton was a kindred spirit and at one point labelled him the 'savior of the world.'[71] The Libyan leader tried to depict his previous conflicts with the White House as aberrations rather than clashes of interests:

> Reagan and I were reduced to insulting each other, 'mad dogs' and things like that. Bush and I were confrontational, but we never stooped to personal insults. With Clinton, I feel a new era is possible
> . . . He does not look down on Third World people as inferior.[72]

By heaping praise on the new American President, Qaddafi was in effect offering to resolve his outstanding difficulties with Washington, including the Lockerbie case, in exchange for a little softness in the U.S. position. At the very least, he hoped to ensure Clinton would 'resist the temptation to demonstrate that he is

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[70] Judith Miller, "Gadhafi takes a new tack," International Herald Tribune, 16 April 1993.

[71] Miller, 239. Qaddafi also rained compliments on British Prime Minister John Major, though they were rather lukewarm in comparison (Annika Savill, "Gaddafi tries to stave off sanctions," Independent, 21 August 1993).

[72] de Borchgrave, op. cit.

decisive by bombing other countries.'[73]

Qaddafi's offer, however pleasantly framed, excited little interest in the White House. The anticipated discontinuities between the Clinton administration's Libya policy and that of its predecessor failed to materialize, in part because Clinton was intent on freeing the Democratic Party from the image of the Carter administration's hand-wringing. Thus, Clinton had no intention of breaking out of the Libya policy he inherited from Bush and Reagan; the self-styled 'new Democrat' wanted to be seen as just as tough on terrorism as any Republican. The Libyan leader's image as the world's leading supporter of terrorism was simply too ingrained to permit any rapid change in U.S. foreign policy.

Terrorism

Consequently, Qaddafi's only hope of softening the American position was to first re-package himself as an opponent of terrorism. This was no easy task, as Libya's support of terrorism did not end, as is popularly supposed, with the 1986 raid on Tripoli. Indeed, by some estimates more Americans died because of Libyan terrorism after 1986 than before, even excluding those killed in the Lockerbie bombing.[74] Throughout the early 1990s

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[73] ibid.

[74] National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Assessment 1996: Instruments of U.S. power, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1996), 145.

extremists from all over the world (including, as Qaddafi himself admitted, the notorious Abu Nidal) still found haven, training, and financial support in Libya.[75] In one illustrative case, a Libyan freighter served as the launch pad for a Palestine Liberation Front raid on an Israeli beach. Due to the vigilance of the Israeli Defence Forces, the raid ended in abject failure: four terrorists were killed and twelve captured. The dazed captives admitted that they trained for the operation in Libya, and were given a personal send-off by a high ranking Libyan official.[76]

Libya had not broken the habit of trying to settle international disputes through subversion. According to Radio Free Lebanon, Libya tried to recruit terrorists from Lebanon for anti-U.S. operations in 1989.[77] In 1989, Libya was accused of inserting commandos into the Philippines to operate with the Moro National Liberation Front.[78] In July 1990, Tripoli supported militant Islamists attempting to overthrow the government of Trinidad.[79] That same year, Qaddafi exploited a Tuareg insurrection in Mali and Nigeria by inviting the rebellious Tuaregs to reside in Libya, where he armed and

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[75] de Borchgrave, op. cit.

[76] SWB ME/0781i, 4 June 1990; see also SWB ME/0858 A/12, 1 September 1990.

[77] SWB ME/0386 A/8, 16 February 1989.

[78] SWB ME/0575 A/6, 30 September 1989.

[79] SWB ME/0831iii, 1 August 1990.

trained them. The rebels were then secretly repatriated. In December 1990, two Libyan intelligence officers were captured in Mali fighting alongside these Tuareg guerrillas.[80] An outraged Malian government bitterly denounced Tripoli's interference.[81]

Nor had Libya developed any respect for the norms of diplomacy. On April 2, 1992, (only days after the Security Council, then chaired by Venezuela, imposed sanctions on Libya) a mob sacked the Venezuelan embassy in Tripoli as Libyan policemen reportedly directed the demonstrators.[82] In Ethiopia, Libyan Ambassador Khalifa Ahmed Bizelya and an aide were expelled on suspicion of abetting terrorism (in 1995 Bizelya was again expelled, this time from London, for conducting activities incompatible with his diplomatic status).

In the Mediterranean, Tripoli still menaced civilian shipping with its claims to the Gulf of Sirte. The Libyan navy repeatedly seized fishing boats in the disputed waters.[83]

Only when the Lockerbie investigation drew to a close (with Libya as the prime suspect) did Qaddafi seem to realize that in the new international environment, terrorism was a less useful policy instrument than it had

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[80] NFSL Newsreport 8, no. 2 (March-April 1991): 8-9.

[81] SWB ME/0870ii, 15 September 1990.

[82] Paul Lewis, "Libyans riot at embassies; U.N. protests," New York Times, 3 April 1992.

[83] SWB ME/0785/A/9, 8 June 1990.

seemed during the 1970s and 1980s:

> The entire world detests terrorism; this is true you may call it what you like: whether bravery or whatever, we do not care; to hell; but today the issue of terrorism is a detested question in the world. You cannot defend yourself from this stand. Consequently, no one should place himself in the dock in this issue.[84]

It was too late, of course, for Qaddafi to take his own advice: he was already in the dock. Getting out required some overt penance. Thus, a year before his 1993 'charm offensive' he enacted a number of reforms designed to reduce his profile as a sponsor of terrorism. He 'abolished' the Libyan Foreign Activities Secretariat--the agency tasked with killing dissidents abroad.[85] He appointed a new director of intelligence to purge the service of links to terrorism.[86] He invited the Arab diplomatic corps to watch as he flamboyantly demolished three terrorist training camps, and invited the UN to inspect any other training sites it suspected of housing terrorists.[87]

Most surprisingly, in June 1992 Libya began furnishing British intelligence with details of its arms shipments to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). As discussed in the previous chapter, these shipments were

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[84] SWB ME/11167/A/13, 3 September 1991.

[85] Also known as the External Security Organization. SWB ME/1524/A/15, 29 October 1992.

[86] Ihsan Hijazi, "Intelligence chief is named by Libya," New York Times, 27 November 1991.

[87] Associated Press, "Libya asks UN to send inspection team to Libya," 30 July 1992.

known to have provided the IRA with some 3,000 automatic rifles, scores of heavy machine guns and Soviet SAM-7 missiles, and literally tonnes of ammunition and explosives (including at least one tonne of Semtex).[88] The British were understandably anxious to discover what additional weaponry had been delivered.

In this way, Qaddafi tried to show the West that he had not only washed his hands of terrorism, but could actually be an asset in the fight against it--particularly the Islamist variety. Here, he said, Libya and the West shared a convergence of interests.[89]

However, it rapidly became evident that these reforms were only cosmetic. The Foreign Activities Secretariat was not actually disbanded but merged into the Justice Ministry.[90] Qaddafi continued to openly advocate the liquidation of dissidents. Underlings formerly responsible for terrorist activities were retained and in some cases promoted. As for the training camps, foreign intelligence agencies concluded the terrorists had simply been moved to new locations.[91] Even Libya's offer to come clean on its support for the IRA was not what it first seemed; one senior Libyan

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[88] Tim Coone, "Gadaffi's guns elude police dragnets," Financial Times, 1 June 1992; E.A. Wayne, "IRA reported to get huge arms shipment from Libya," Christian Science Monitor, 27 November 1987; Craig Whitney, "Havel says his predecessors sent Libya explosives," New York Times, 23 March 1990.

[89] de Borchgrave, op. cit.

[90] SWB ME/1524 A/15, 29 October 1992.

[91] Washington Post, 28 February 1992.

foreign ministry official indicated that all the information supplied was false.[92] Qaddafi himself showed a marked reluctance to surrender any hard information, stating: 'If I give them such a history of our connections, then they could use this information to accuse me of specific crimes. It could create another problem such as the Lockerbie accusations.'[93]

Why, one must ask, did Qaddafi not take more decisive steps to disassociate himself from terrorism? The Libyan leader was apparently hedging his bets in case his moderation failed to yield results (though thus hobbled, his reforms could scarcely do otherwise). For a weak state with few other bargaining chips, retaining a terrorist capability made some sense. But it was not just Libya's lack of other military or diplomatic options that made Qaddafi reluctant to abandon terrorism as a policy option. Terrorism remained closely linked to his world view; as he made abundantly clear, he identified with the 'freedom fighters' under his care and approved of their actions. Such a deep-seated conviction could be momentarily disguised, but never fully abandoned. As one European diplomat noted: 'People had thought there was a new Qaddafi, more mature--someone who was beginning to behave like an international statesman. It is as if he

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[92] Time Kelsey and Peter Koenig, "Libya will not arm IRA again, Gaddafi aide says," Independent, 20 July 1994.

[93] Marie Colvin, "Gadaffi goes back on his promise to reveal IRA deals," Sunday Times (London), 10 May 1992.

can only be held back so long and then he lets loose.'[94] Qaddafi would have to find another means of convincing the international community to accept his rehabilitation.

Befriending the Zionist enemy

Rapprochement with Israel was the astonishing--and potentially brilliant--*pièce de résistance* of Qaddafi's reformation. Secret preparations for such a reconciliation began as early as 1991, with Qaddafi sending and receiving feelers from Israel through the auspices of numerous intermediaries (including the Italian government and a famed Middle East arms dealer). In the spring of 1993 Tripoli invited Libyan-born Jews (who were summarily expelled by the monarchy in 1950) to return, either to visit or to live. Moreover, Qaddafi agreed in principle to pay compensation to those Jews and Italians whose assets were appropriated in 1970.[95] Since many of these Libyan Jews now resided in Israel, Qaddafi was essentially holding out the prospect of normalizing relations with Tel Aviv. Indeed, Libya's Foreign Minister, Omar El Muntasir, soon announced that Libya was prepared to make peace with Israel.[96] To demonstrate the regime's sincerity, some 200 Libyan Muslim pilgrims

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[94] Chris Hedges, "Libya, fearing attack, braces for clash with West," New York Times, 19 February 1992.

[95] Judith Miller, "Gadhafi takes a new tack," International Herald Tribune, 16 April 1993.

[96] Judith Miller, "Muammar dearest," The New Republic, 31 May 1993.

journeyed to Jerusalem with Qaddafi's blessing--the first such pilgrimage ever sponsored by an Arab state. Much to the horror of Palestinian and Arab hard-lingers, the Colonel himself was said to be contemplating making the trip.[97]

Though Libyan foreign policy was famed for its mercurial, quirky nature, even the most optimistic proponents of Middle East peace were unprepared to see Tripoli suddenly express interest in reconciling with the Jewish state. Qaddafi, after all, had made a career of blaming Israel for the Arabs' woes; anti-Zionism had been the foundation of his foreign policy for more than two decades. If sincere, Qaddafi was initiating not only a monumental shift in Libyan foreign policy but a dramatic change in regional dynamics. Libya's defection from the rejectionist camp would boost the morale of the moderate Arab states and further splinter those that still dreamt of pushing the Israelis into the sea.

Why then would Qaddafi even consider making such an abrupt *volte-face*? The Colonel evidently calculated that, if given the choice between punishing Tripoli for sponsoring terrorism and welcoming a reformed Arab nationalist into the peace camp, Israel's influential American supporters would choose the latter and swing U.S. foreign policy behind them.

The Libyan pilgrims received a warm welcome from the

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[97] Ben Lynfield and Christopher Walker, "Gaddafi hints at Israel trip as pilgrims cut visit short," Times, 2 June 1993.

Israeli authorities. But then, at a news conference to celebrate their presence, the pilgrims abruptly reversed the friendly tone of their visit by calling upon the Islamic world to liberate Jerusalem.[98] They were quickly shown the way back to the airport by their hosts, who took the episode with a grain of salt. As Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres remarked: 'I have no illusions. The Libyans came to us to make a good impression on America.'[99]

Had Qaddafi mustered the fortitude to see it through, his Israel gambit might still have succeeded. The Colonel tried to brush aside the pilgrimage imbroglio as a misunderstanding and insisted that Israelis would be welcomed at an upcoming interfaith conference in Tripoli.[100] However, he never followed up the official pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a comparable overture. Apparently Qaddafi felt he had overexposed himself and was reluctant to do so again.[101] Though the United States reportedly advised Tel Aviv against pursuing

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[98] Elaine Ruth Fletcher, "Israeli-Libyan exchange turns into political fiasco," Christian Science Monitor, 2 June 1993.

[99] As quoted in Judith Miller, God has ninety-nine names, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 240.

[100] de Borchgrave, op. cit.

[101] Tripoli blew hot and cold on the question of Israel for some months afterwards. As late as June 1994, Foreign Minister Muntasir signalled a possible softening of Libya's position, saying: 'We do not reject the peace agreement in the Middle East.' Only a few months later, however, Tripoli reiterated its old position that peace was not about borders but existence, and was achievable only through the destruction of Israel (SWB ME/0887 A/6, 5 October 1990).

relations with Tripoli, only Qaddafi's hesitancy actually interred the initiative.[102]

Deeper into the quagmire

Thus, as the October 1st deadline approached, each element of Qaddafi's diplomatic initiative--his overtures to the Great Powers, his renunciation of terrorism, and his erstwhile acceptance of Israel--was either suspect or inconclusive. Qaddafi nonetheless felt he had demonstrated his good faith and refused to further moderate his policies, even rhetorically, until he received some indication that the Security Council would let him off the hook. Yet, so far as the dominant UN players were concerned, there had been no seachange in Libya behavior. (Of course, whether whole-hearted reformation would have softened the Security Council's attitude is necessarily a matter of conjecture. What is clear, however, is that Tripoli tried to test the waters without getting wet, and that was not good enough.)

The United States, Britain, and France once again lobbied the other members of the Security Council to impose additional sanctions on Tripoli. Libya made its own entreaties to the Council members, but found little cause for optimism. A visibly frustrated Qaddafi

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[102] Africa Confidential 34 (13 August 1993): 8; Africa Confidential 34 (10 September 1993): 4; Washington Post, 23 July 1993.

threatened to set Libya's oil wells ablaze *à la Saddam*.[103]

On November 11, 1993, the Security Council passed Resolution 883, imposing additional sanctions upon Libya for its non-compliance with the Council's previous resolutions. Among other things, the Resolution stipulated that in the event the Lockerbie suspects appeared for trial in the United Kingdom or United States, *the sanctions set forth in resolutions 748 and 883 would be suspended, not terminated, pending Libya's full compliance with the further provisions of resolutions 731 and 748*. If Libya had not fully complied with those provisions within 90 days, the suspension would terminate. The idea, as American officials were fond of saying, was to 'keep Qaddafi in his box.'

The passage of Resolution 883 was Libya's third straight defeat in the Security Council in less than two years, and marked the end of the Jamahiriya's reformation campaign. Though that campaign had proven ineffectual rather than counterproductive, its demise spurred Tripoli to re-embrace the counterproductive policies of yore. In December 1993, Qaddafi invited the IRA and known Palestinian terrorists Abu Nidal and Ahmed Jibril to a summit in Tripoli, vowing that Libya would be 'a Mecca'

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[103] "Gadhafi threatens to burn oil wells," International Herald Tribune, 3 September 1993.

for terrorists.[104] That same month Mansour Kikhia, a former Libyan Foreign Minister who had since become a leader of the all but defunct expatriate opposition, disappeared from his Cairo hotel room. He was allegedly kidnapped, whisked across the border and executed.

Conclusion

The emergence of a new international order had a profound impact upon the security of most Third World states, especially the so-called 'rogue states.' As the quintessential rogue state leader, Qaddafi's challenge was to ward off the threats that this new order posed to Libya's security. However, the policies he devised to meet the exigencies of this post-Cold War environment proved ineffectual or counterproductive. Libya therefore became paralyzed by an international strategy of containment.

Containment was more, however, than the result of a shift in the global balance of power, more too than the product of short-term tactical errors, lapses of judgement, or ill fortune. Rather, Libya's quandary was the bitter harvest that followed years of disregarding international norms. The long accumulation of aggrieved neighbors was an important factor (as evidenced by Morocco's refusal to support Tripoli in the Security Council). So too was Libya's reputation as a state-

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[104] Reuters, "Qaddafi summons militants," New York Times, 14 December 1993; Reuters, "Qaddafi calls Libya a Mecca for guerrillas," New York Times, 18 December 1993.

sponsor of terrorism, which created a political climate (particularly in the United States) supportive of containment. The definitive factor, of course, was Libya's history of picking fights with states far more powerful than itself.

Under the weight of UN sanctions Libyan national security sank to a new nadir. The ban on weapons, parts and advisers compounded the armed force's already notorious maintenance problems. With each passing year under the sanctions regimen, an ever-growing percentage of military equipment was doomed to become inoperative. Moreover, the sanctions threatened to erode the regime's internal security as the economy began a slow-burn. Finally, the development of weapons of mass destruction was another point of friction with the West which kept the threat of military reprisals on the horizon.

This chapter concludes our four-part chronological analysis of Libyan national security policy, the intent of which was to assess that policy's overall efficacy. In each period, the historical record has supported our contention that Libyan policy was counterproductive when measured against its apparent objectives, and hence irrational. As we shall see in the following chapter, Libya's war in Chad was no less self-defeating.

Chapter 5

Qaddafi's Vietnam: The Libyan war in Chad

Libya is the defender of Africa. . . . We are the ones interested in peace in Chad . . . because we are an extension of Chad and Chad is an extension of us.

-- *Muammar El Qaddafi*
Speech at Tripoli,
5 March 1982

Is war rational? Or, to put a finer point on it, are certain wars rational and others not? Doubtless there are some who would consider even the suggestion that war is rational to be a repugnant and inflammatory thought, perhaps even a self-serving justification for violence. The temptation to condemn war *a priori* is understandable; nevertheless, war should not be lightly deemed less rational than any other human activity. Nor should rationality, particularly in the restricted sense in which we are using the term, be confused with that which is good or desirable. If we think of war in the Clausewitzian sense (as an extension of politics) there is no shortage of statesmen and academics who would admit its potent rationality. Organized violence, as has been observed, may at times be the shortest distance between two points. Indeed, one could argue persuasively that it is precisely because wars so often produce desired ends

that they recur with such regularity in human history.[1] Let us therefore assume that war is a neutral activity, not intrinsically rational but capable of being so.

The admission that war may be rational obliges us to accept the existence of irrational war as well, lest rationality cease to have any meaning. How then can rational wars be distinguished from those that are irrational? By applying Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means we can reason syllogistically that the criteria for judging rationality in war do not differ greatly from those that we have thus far employed with regards to policy.[2] Rationality in war is therefore demonstrated by the accomplishment of political objectives, and is independent of whether a given war is offensive or defensive (which are clumsy concepts in any event), and even of whether the outcome on the battlefield is victory or defeat. The logic of this rather startling assertion becomes apparent upon consideration. Failure taken in isolation does not necessarily denote irrationality, and military defeat can still produce strategic victory (as in the Tet Offensive or Egypt's 1973 War). In contrast, a war distinguished by consistently self-defeating behavior is irrational.

The hallmarks of such a conflict might include obscure

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[1] See Lawrence Freedman, ed., War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4-5.

[2] For Clausewitz's famous formulation, see Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 99.

political objectives, an inappropriate strategy, or one that is poorly executed.

Qaddafi's war in Chad was irrational. In two decades of military adventurism Libya failed to decisively achieve any of its war aims yet inflicted serious damage upon itself. The war shattered the LAF's morale. It alienated the states most sympathetic to Qaddafi's militant Third Worldism. Instead of securing Libya's southern border, it provided Libya's enemies--France, the United States, and to a lesser extent Egypt and Sudan--with an arena for bleeding off Libya's military strength. Domestically, the war diverted scarce resources from development, yet produced no obvious benefits. By every conceivable measure Libya's war in Chad was counterproductive.

As the title of this chapter suggests, Vietnam is an appropriate metaphor for Libya's war in Chad. This is not least because the American failure--with its attendant social turmoil and loss of national confidence--never ceased to provide rhetorical inspiration for the Libyan leader. Qaddafi cited the war as proof that American soldiers were cowards, and America itself a 'paper tiger.'[3] One would expect a leader so acquainted with another nation's putative defects to guard against them, but in Qaddafi this expectation was not fulfilled. By embroiling his forces in a conflict of dubious

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[3] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) ME/6517/A/2, 8 September 1980.

strategic worth and by managing that conflict counterproductively, he repeated the most grievous mistakes America made in Vietnam. It seemed that Qaddafi was determined to be the leader of a Great Power, even if that meant emulating the Great Powers' mistakes.

To assist the reader, the following pages contain an abbreviated outline of the Chadian civil war. Admittedly, simplification and a certain degree of distortion are inevitable when the history of a civil war is compressed into two paragraphs. Nevertheless, for those unacquainted with Chad this synopsis should prove helpful. There follows an analysis of Qaddafi's war aims which provides the standard whereby we may measure Tripoli's achievement. The remainder of this chapter traces Libya's interventions chronologically, underscoring the counterproductive consequences that followed each.

A brief anatomy of a civil war

Contemporary Chad is the offspring of French colonialism, its national boundaries contrived by fiat in 1946, its disparate peoples--many of whom harbored little interest in building a multi-ethnic nation-state--arbitrarily lumped together for administrative convenience.[4] Like the Sudan, Chad is ethnically bifurcated between Arab north and black south. It is

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[4] The best history of modern Chad is John Wright's Libya, Chad and the Central Sahara (London: Hurst & Company, 1989).

also geographically bifurcated: the north is mostly desert, whereas the south is arable. It was in the latter region, 'le Tchad utile,' that the French established their administration when they arrived in the nineteenth century. Able colonialists, the French lost no time in turning the existing ethnic frictions to their advantage. The French needed willing clients; the Sara (the dominant black ethnic group) needed relief from the Tebu, Arab/Muslim slave-raiders living in the Sahelian and Saharan regions to the north (especially the Borku, Ennedi and Tibesti provinces [BET]), where French rule remained nominal. The match was quickly consummated.

There were naturally tensions with other colonial powers in the area. After prolonged disputations over the 1919 border demarcation, France agreed to cede the area known as the Aouzou Strip to Libya (then under Italian domination) in the Mussolini-Laval accords of 7 January 1935. Unfortunately, the treaty was ratified by the French parliament (unanimously in the Senate and with a vote of 555 for and only 9 against in the Chamber of Deputies) but never by the president, with the result that when Libya gained its independence in 1951, popular sentiment agreed that the border represented a historical injustice. In response, King Idris made a tentative grab at the strip in February 1955, but his forces were repelled by French troops.[5]

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[5] Bernard Lanne, Tchad-Libye: La querelle des frontieres (Paris: Karthala, 1982), 210. Lanne's is the most comprehensive account of the origins of the Aouzou dispute.

Upon independence in 1960, the Sara (favored by their closer ties to the French) set up the first post-colonial government with Francois Tombalbaye as Prime Minister. In 1965 the comparatively disenfranchised northerners rebelled and organized their forces into the Front de Libération Nationale de Tchad, or FROLINAT. After a decade of indecisive civil war, which kept the government dependent upon French assistance, Tombalbaye was toppled by a Sara-led coup in 1975. Discord also plagued the FROLINAT. A 1976 falling out between two rival warlords, Goukouni Oueddei and Hissein Habré, presaged years of internecine combat that became the defining conflict of the civil war. In 1978 Habré entered into a government of national unity with Tombalbaye's successor, Félix Malloum, which dissolved in early 1979 as Habré temporarily aligned himself with Goukouni once more. By the end of the year all three factions had entered into a Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition (GUNT), but in early 1980 fighting broke out between Habré's faction, the *Forces Armées du Nord* (FAN), and Goukouni's *Forces Armées Populaires* (FAP). Goukouni, by allying himself with the remnants of Malloum's forces (FAT), emerged as the effective head of the GUNT. For the next several years control of Chad see-sawed between Goukouni and Habré. Although Habré emerged as the leader of a (relatively) unified Chad in 1987, he himself was deposed by Idriss Déby in 1990. It was into this maelstrom of conflict and

shifting alliances that North Africa's least experienced leader plunged his young state in 1969.

Why Chad?

That such an inauspicious state became the focal point of Libyan military activity between 1969 and 1987 is somewhat surprising when one remembers that Qaddafi's ultimate aim was to transform Libya into a Great Power. Chad, after all, had the unenviable distinction of ranking among the poorest countries in the world. Its sheer size was a potential asset but could also be a formidable liability. Defending its immense space, even with the aid of press-ganged Chadians, would severely strain the capacity of Libya's armed forces (which were already sorely taxed to defend the borders of Libya proper). Though the Aouzou Strip along the Libyan border was rumored to hold uranium deposits, the existence of these was never independently confirmed. In short, Chad was no strategic prize. Instead it was a sieve into which any conqueror would have to pour billions of dollars in aid before realizing any significant pay-off.

What did Qaddafi hope to accomplish in Chad? Even Qaddafi's countrymen were apparently hard-pressed to decipher his intentions, and few non-Libyans have ventured authoritative answers to this basic question.[6]

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[6] Nolutshungu, for example, submits that: 'The true nature of Libya's aims in Chad was a matter of speculation.' Sam C. Nolutshungu, Limits of anarchy: Intervention and state formation in Chad (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 150.

Again, the temptation to dismiss Libyan behavior as inscrutable must be resisted.

As with Libya's broader national security objectives, we must discern Qaddafi's war aims not only from what he proclaimed them to be, but from what reason and experience confirm. Only thus can we parse the screen of state propaganda and arrive at some approximation of Libya's real objectives. To demonstrate the necessity of a critical approach, consider that though Libya frequently justified its interventions in terms of defending Islam, this putative *casus belli* did not prevent Qaddafi from allying himself at one point with the non-Muslim south against the Muslim north!

Both reason and experience suggest that Chad became the object of Qaddafi's attention for one simple yet compelling reason: it was weak. Chad was the course of least resistance for Qaddafi's Grand Strategy, its selection made almost inevitable by the debility of its military and state institutions. As amply demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Qaddafi could rarely resist an opportunity to meddle in the internal affairs of other nations.

Obviously, Tripoli did not explain its Chad policy in these terms. Libya betrayed its motives only to the degree that they could be passed off as defensive. As early as 1971 Qaddafi fretted that 'the Americans may be

in Chad tomorrow.'[7] Preventing the encirclement of 'the Great 1 September Revolution' by hostile powers (e.g., France, the United States, and Egypt) became his favored explanation for Libya's incursions into Chad.[8] As usual, these expressions of threat perception shed little insight into Libyan behavior. Even Deeb concedes that Qaddafi found the mere prospect of an independent Chadian government to be threatening, and concludes that his 'military intervention was therefore not merely a defensive action against the perceived threat . . . it was also an aggressive pursuit of his interest.'[9]

To further obfuscate his motives Qaddafi dressed up his actions in anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist garb, often making vociferous verbal attacks on France. Only Libya had legitimate interests in Chad:

> The events in Chad are of direct bearing on us because of our unmistakable proximity to the country. Events in Chad, on the other hand, have nothing to do with French, American or Egyptian security.[10]

Propinquity was therefore held by Qaddafi to be

legitimacy (except when, one assumes, when Libya

delivered weapons to the IRA or armed separatists in the

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[7] "CBS News interview of Colonel Mu'ammar el-Gathafi," Libyan Arab Republic Ministry of Information, 16 December 1971, (Washington, D.C.: World Wide Printing Service, n.d.), 18.

[8] Benyamin Neuberger, Involvement, invasion and withdrawal: Qadhdhafi's Libya and Chad, 1969-1981 (Tel Aviv: The Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1982), 60.

[9] Mary-Jane Deeb, Libya's foreign policy in North Africa (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 131-133.

[10] SWB ME/6645/A/2, 10 February 1981.

South Pacific--in which case revolution or faith became legitimacy). And though Qaddafi denied neighboring Egypt any legitimate interests in Chad, Libya's own interests were so comprehensive as to embrace the entire continent: 'When we fight for the freedom of Africa, we are actually defending ourselves.'[11] As always, Qaddafi's convictions were as elastic as occasion required.

In contrast, his true war aims--though fluid--remained within clear parameters. Qaddafi saw Chad as a Libyan hinterland rather than as a proper nation-state.[12] His strategic goal was to gain political control over Chad and ultimately to incorporate its territory into Libya proper, thereby making his state a power to be reckoned with--at least for the cartographers. This grand aim became readily apparent over time but was rarely enunciated as such. Instead, Qaddafi maintained that he was merely attempting to 'secure the borders of Libya.'[13] Yet his subsidiary objectives, many of which were explicitly admitted, betrayed his true aims. These included:

- The elimination of French influence in Chad and elsewhere in Africa (specifically, by forcing the removal of French forces and in general, by opposing the French-supported

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[11] SWB ME/6972/B/6, 8 March 1982.

[12] An oft-stated position. For example, Qaddafi called Aouzou a Libyan oasis whose inhabitants 'would not understand if they were told that they are Chadians and not Libyans' (as cited in Deeb, 132). See also "Gaddafi states 'Chad is not a country!,'" NFSL Newsreport 7, no. 4 (July-August 1990): 4.

[13] SWB ME/6644/A/4, 9 February 1981.

government and other French clients).[14]

- The occupation, annexation, and defence of the Aouzou Strip.[15]

- The installation of a pro-Libyan regime.[16]

There is some reason to believe that Qaddafi saw Chad as a trans-Sahelian conduit through which he could create an African empire.[17] The implausibility of the scheme does not mean the idea was not entertained in Tripoli. If Nolutshungu is correct in arguing that those who saw such an 'imperial grand design' behind Libya's activities in Chad 'were failing to distinguish the oneiric from the real in Libyan policy,' then Qaddafi must be included among their numbers.[18] He himself fanned such fears by calling for the creation of an 'Islamic Republic' and by claiming that the Touaregs (a

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[14] For a sampling of Qaddafi's anti-French diatribes during this epoch, see Gideon Gera, "Libya," in Middle East Contemporary Survey: 1977-78, vol. 2, ed. Colin Legum, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979), 642.

[15] The strip, said Tripoli, 'is an integral part of the Libyan territory like . . . Tripoli and Benghazi,' and hence Libya would interpret 'any military action against Aouzou as a declaration of war against it.' As quoted in Yehudit Ronen, "Libya," in Middle East contemporary survey: 1987, vol. 11, ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 555.

[16] As Jalloud put it, '(we) cannot possibly accept (anyone) imposing a regime on Chad hostile to the Libyan people.' SWB ME/6626/B/1, 19 January 1981; see also Rabinovich and Shaked, 553.

[17] A theme often picked up by the press. See for example James Markham's pieces: "Libya steps up role in Chad's civil war: Troop shifts arouse concern that Qaddafi seeks to build Islamic nation south of Sahara," New York Times, 4 December 1980; and "Libya's Islamic visions are a real nightmare in Africa," New York Times, 28 December 1980.

[18] Nolutshungu, 151.

nomadic sub-Saharan people found in Chad, Algeria, Niger and Mali) were in fact Libyans.[19] The French found this particularly alarming, since they saw in it a veiled threat to Niger, and hence to the uranium which fed the French nuclear program.

Having acquainted ourselves with Chad and Qaddafi's aims, let us now examine how the Libyan leader translated his ambitions into policy.

Embroilment

Qaddafi's designs on Chad, though they did not leap fully articulated from his brow on the morning he seized power in 1969, were already germinating on that fateful day. During the first year of his rule he gave teeth to the anti-Tombalbaye policy inherited from the Sanusi monarchy. King Idris had permitted the founder of FROLINAT, Dr. Abba Siddick, to operate from Tripoli and had provided the FROLINAT with rhetorical support. Nevertheless, the monarchy's support of the rebels stopped short of military aid and thus avoided a complete diplomatic rupture with N'Djamena.[20] Soon after taking office Qaddafi removed this prohibition and reportedly provided the FROLINAT with a base inside Libya, along with weapons and insurgency training, the operational

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[19] The Islamic Republic thesis is found in Martin Sicker, The making of a pariah state: The adventurist politics of Muammar Qaddafi (New York: Praeger, 1987): 89-91. See also Ronald Bruce St. John, Qaddafi's world design: Libyan foreign policy, 1969-1987 (London: Saqi Books, 1987), 101.

[20] Wright, 129.

effect of which was probably slight since the Libyan military at the time was itself barely functional.[21] Slight or not, this minor escalation in aid did little to facilitate relations with Tombalbaye, and a war of words between the two capitals climaxed with accusations that Libya instigated a coup d'etat against Tombalbaye in August 1971.

The coup failed. Incensed, N'Djamena severed relations with Tripoli, proclaimed itself a haven for anti-Qaddafi dissidents and even staked an irredentist claim to southern Libya![22] In just under twenty-four months Qaddafi had thus precipitated (whether through a coup or its antecedents) the first of what was to be a long string of self-inflicted injuries in Chad. In fact, the rupture with Tombalbaye might have escalated into fighting were it not for the restraining influence of France, whose unwillingness to intercede forced Tombalbaye to reconcile with Qaddafi--in effect, rewarding Libya's pressure tactics. Tombalbaye, bitter but disillusioned, met with Qaddafi in April 1972 and agreed to break relations with Israel in exchange for peace.[23] By some accounts, he also secretly ceded the Aouzou Strip (a sizable piece of territory in Northern

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[21] Neuberger, 25.

[22] "Chad breaks Libyan ties, charging a coup attempt," New York Times, 29 August 1971.

[23] "Libya halts aid to Chad rebels: Fort-Lamy split with Israel apparently is rewarded," New York Times, 8 April 1973.

Chad) to Libya.[24] In December the two nations signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Although Tripoli pledged to curb its aid to the FROLINAT, in actuality the tenor and tempo of its activities remained unchanged.[25]

By ignoring Tombalbaye's pleas, Paris delivered to Qaddafi what he himself had failed to achieve through subversion. The French, however, were losing confidence in Tombalbaye's ability to restore order and were reluctant to further entangle their forces in an unpromising civil war. Although France tried to buy off Libya's support of FROLINAT by selling Mirage fighters to Tripoli in early 1970, within months it became apparent that Tripoli was not keeping its part of the bargain.[26] The fatigue evident in France's ambiguous position was further marked in mid 1972 when French combat units ceased fighting alongside Chadian troops.[27] The result of France's hesitancy was to prolong Chad's misery, keeping the government and rebels in an agitated limbo

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[24] For years Libya categorically denied its occupation of the Aouzou Strip. Not until 1988 did Libya publicly claim a secret agreement was reached (Wright, 130). For additional details, see Neuberger, 27; n.b. Lanne, 228-231, who argues such an agreement would have been illegal and was therefore improbable.

[25] Neuberger, 28.

[26] French Defence Minister Michel Debré explicitly cited Libya's cessation of aid to the rebels as a term of sale (John Hess, "France now says Libyans will get total of 100 jets," New York Times, 22 January 1970). In one memorable ambush later that year, 11 French soldiers were killed and 10 wounded by rebels using Libyan-supplied weapons (Henry Giniger, "Criticism of French role in Chad increases in Paris," New York Times, 14 October 1970).

[27] Neuberger, 27.

between triumph and negotiated settlement.

Qaddafi capitalized on France's flagging commitment by occupying the Aouzou Strip in 1973 (after numerous small incursions in 1972) and quietly annexing the territory two years later.[28] Scarcely a ripple was heard in international circles, making this one of the great short-term successes of Libyan national security policy. Tombalbaye, having been left twisting in the wind, was finally deposed by his own kinsmen in 1975.

The fall of Tombalbaye did not placate Tripoli, which instead became increasingly aggressive. As Libya's relations with Egypt worsened in 1977, Qaddafi began to see Chad as a zero-sum battlefield. He decided to again gamble on France's lethargy. Libyan forces operating in conjunction with FROLINAT units captured almost all of northern Chad in mid 1977, and the French military response was limited to ferrying Malloum's forces to the battlefield.[29] Malloum broke relations with Tripoli on February 6, 1978, protested Libya's behavior to the UN Security Council, and pleaded for assistance--to no avail.[30] Aside from Egypt (which sent arms and advisors), few nations seemed inclined to come to the government's aid (though the United States promised to

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[28] "Libya said to annex an area of Chad," New York Times, 8 September 1975; "New Libyan maps annex territory from 3 neighbors," New York Times, 10 September 1976.

[29] Paul Lewis, "Intervention in Chad disclosed by French," New York Times, 20 July 1977.

[30] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt's road to Jerusalem, (New York: Random House, 1997), 63.

consider sympathetically any requests for military aid).[31] Even Egypt was more concerned with defending Sudan (and thus the Nile) than with propping up N'Djamena. When the fall of Faya-Largeau (a strategically positioned town in northern Chad) on February 19 failed to excite any international reaction, Malloum--like Tombalbaye before him--felt compelled to pursue appeasement.

A few weeks and two conferences later, Qaddafi and Malloum concluded a lop-sided agreement known as the Benghazi Accords which amounted to little more than an enumeration of Qaddafi's war aims.[32] Both parties called for the withdrawal of all French forces from Chad. The accords also stipulated that Malloum would formally recognize the FROLINAT and accept an immediate cease-fire (to be monitored by troops from Libya and Niger), thus freezing the map in Libya's favor. Libya, Niger, and Sudan were made the 'guarantors' of the agreement--thereby giving Tripoli a hook with which to justify further intervention. The accords collapsed in less than a month, apparently by mutual dissent. The forces of Qaddafi's client, Goukouni Oueddei, (accompanied by

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[31] Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. steps up offers of arms to Africans; ready to aid Sudan: Help for Chad also weighed," New York Times, 28 July 1977. For evidence of covert Egyptian participation, see "Rebels in Chad report cutting off a regional capital in the North," New York Times, 16 February 1978.

[32] Neuberger, 34. According to Boutros-Ghali (112-113), Egypt tried to help Chad pass a resolution condemning Libya's agression at the July 1978 OAU summit but failed because Libyan diplomats bribed the other delegates!

Libyan 'advisers') quickly advanced to within striking range of N'Djamena.[33]

Qaddafi seemed to be on the verge of victory. However, by seeking too much, too soon, and with too little subtlety, he finally galvanized Malloum's allies into action. This soon proved to be his second costly error of the war. The French air force began flying sorties against the Libyan-FAP forces and, after intensive bombardment, brought the advance to a halt some 100-150 miles from the capital. French Foreign Legionnaires were deployed in April, and for the first time Paris and Tripoli stood on the brink of open warfare.[34] Libya blinked, and a cease-fire was established.

Frustrated by the collapse of the FAP offensive, Qaddafi sent Jalloud to parley with the French. After negotiations in Paris, Jalloud and his interlocutors allegedly reached a secret agreement on splitting Chad into spheres of influence--a proposal Qaddafi is said to have made rather crudely ('if you leave me the Muslims, I will leave you the Blacks.')[35] If such a *modus vivendi* were in fact established, it signified that both sides

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[33] Deeb argues (129) that Qaddafi's clients must have acted without his approval since it was 'not in Libya's interests at that time to reignite the hostilities.' This misses the point that a failure to control his clients was still Qaddafi's failure, and made him no less responsible for the deleterious aftermath.

[34] Gera, 642; "Foreign Legionnaires are rushed to Chad," New York Times, 21 April 1978.

[35] Neuberger, 35, citing Jeune Afrique (24 December 1980).

were biding their time: Libya, until it could launch a fresh offensive; and France, in hopes that it could undercut Qaddafi by negotiating a peace between the warring Chadian factions.[36]

Of the two sides, France got the better deal since it gave away nothing new; Paris had already accepted the *de facto* partition of Chad. The result was to keep Qaddafi at bay, while France engineered a reconciliation between Malloum and Hissein Habré, who formed a joint government in August 1978. When the union collapsed under the weight of mutual suspicion in February 1979, France quietly shifted its support to Habré as the party most likely to achieve stable rule.

This strategy immediately paid strategic dividends, as Qaddafi became apprehensive that his principal client, Goukouni, would join Habré in a coalition government. As practitioners of realpolitik, Goukouni and Qaddafi were too well matched for the latter's comfort. Each was willing to accept the other so far as their interests converged. But that convergence, they both knew, was quite limited. Qaddafi wanted to use Goukouni to establish a puppet regime; Goukouni sought only to install himself as the uncontested ruler of Chad, after

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[36] On 30 July 1978, Tripoli attempted a commando raid against the French Mirage squadron at N'Djamena airport (to deprive French ground forces of air support and thus revive the FAP drive); the operation was aborted because of inclement weather. Thus died Qaddafi's hopes of a quick military victory. Francois Soudan and Joseph Goulden, Kaddafi, la CIA et les marchands de mort (Paris: Jeune Afrique Livres, 1987) 97-100; cf. John Cooley, Libyan sandstorm (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 193-195.

which he would have little need of Qaddafi. Neither made any secret of their mutual distrust and lack of allegiance.

Once again, Qaddafi set in motion a series of events that realized his worst fears. He placed Goukouni under house arrest, and when disputes erupted between Goukouni's forces and those of Asil Achmat in October 1978, the Libyans sided with the latter.[37] Thus were sown the seeds of resentment that matured in March 1979, when Goukouni (who resurfaced in December 1978) and Habré did in fact create a united front against Qaddafi--the *Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition* (GUNT). By trying to force his client's loyalty, Qaddafi had transformed him into a formidable enemy.

Destruction of the GUNT became Qaddafi's primary tactical objective, but that task was beyond the capabilities of the LAF. A sizable Libyan force (est. 2500 men) sent into the BET region to punish the FAP was soundly repulsed by Goukouni's forces, which continued to enjoy French air support.[38] Alienating Goukouni was truly Qaddafi's third major self-inflicted injury in Chad.

The Libyan leader was left with only two relatively

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[37] Neuberger, 40. Achmat, ethnically black but culturally Arab, was a prototype of the followers Qaddafi imagined would flock to his banner. His followers formed the pro-Libyan *Conseil Démocratique de la Révolution* (CDR).

[38] "Libyan offensive deep into Chad is described as military disaster," New York Times, 21 April 1979; "Chad leader says forces routed Libyan invaders," New York Times, 27 July 1979.

insignificant clients: Achmat and Abdelkader Kamougué. Kamougué, who served as Malloum's foreign minister and now led the remnants of the Sara forces which Habré had driven from N'djamena, visited Tripoli in May 1979 and was soon receiving Libyan armaments.[39] This put Qaddafi in the incongruous position of supplying weapons to Chad's southern Christians for use against the northern Muslims!

Qaddafi rallied from military defeat and switched his attack to the negotiating table. Libya's performance did not, in the beginning, favorably distinguish itself in the annals of diplomatic history. During a spring peace conference in Kano, Nigeria, Qaddafi conspired with the host government to place Habré and Goukouni under house arrest until they caved in to a joint Libyan-Nigerian demand to admit Qaddafi's clients to the GUNT. Understandably outraged by this treatment, both men ignored their pledge upon returning to Chad.[40] By August, however, the GUNT was faltering and Qaddafi had learnt the difference between pressure and duress. With the support of neighboring African states Libya induced the two Chadians to make concessions. Achmat and Kamougué were admitted to the GUNT in November, 1979. This was one of the most brilliant diplomatic successes of Qaddafi's career, and he capitalized on it by pressuring Goukouni to turn on Habré. This was an appeal

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[39] Neuberger, 46.

[40] Neuberger, 45-46.

to the Chadian's self-interest, since it seemed evident that the unwieldy coalition would not long survive. Showing that he truly had no permanent friends, only permanent interests, Goukouni finally relented. In March 1980, Chad slid back into civil war.

Having thrown the dice, Goukouni set fire to his bridges. In May he expelled the French military mission from Chad. A few weeks later, on June 15, 1980, he signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Libya. This supplied Libya with a pretext for sending an expeditionary force into Chad to restore order, and within weeks the first platoons of Libyan troops were fighting in N'djamena. Another 7,000 troops followed to aid Goukouni in repulsing a FAN offensive in October 1980. After quelling the enemy advance they counterattacked. Habré's forces, all but defenseless against Libyan air power, collapsed. On December 15, 1980, the FAN fled from N'Djamena to the Sudanese border and Libyan units occupied the capital.[41]

This was in many ways Qaddafi's finest hour. Persistence, force and coercive diplomacy had at long last yielded results. He had splintered the GUNT, banished the French, and had conquered nearly all of Chad in only six months. It was a sweet moment, but it did not last.

Qaddafi summoned Goukouni (who was in no position to

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[41] James Markham, "Libyan troops control Chad's capital," New York Times, 17 December 1980; "Libyans replace French in Chad's battered capital," New York Times, 28 December 1980.

object to his patron's whims) to Tripoli and on January 6, 1981, the two signed an accord to upgrade their relations from 'strategic and fateful alliance' to 'complete unity.'[42] Libya pledged to help Chad to 'eliminate the remnants of agent reaction which co-operates with colonialism' (i.e., mop up the French clients); to 'send a number of military men to assist in keeping security and maintaining peace' (i.e., institutionalize Libyan military occupation); and to fend off the 'agent regimes in Egypt and Sudan.'[43] Announcement of this pending union, to which Qaddafi apparently expected the world would be indifferent, proved to be a portentous miscalculation. The Libyan leader had unwittingly initiated a chain of events that would erase all of his hard-won gains within a mere nine months. This was his fourth major miscalculation.

Before assessing the consequences, let us briefly address the contention that Qaddafi's declaration of unity was purely symbolic and meant to be understood as such.[44] The argument itself is unpersuasive: Libya's behavior in the BET region--where Chadians were issued Libyan identity cards, Libyan currency was circulated, the Libyan flag was flown and People's Committees were

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[42] "Libya and Chad say border will be opened," New York Times, 7 January 1981.

[43] The declaration is reproduced *in toto* in Neuberger, 69-71.

[44] Nolutshungu, 151.

created--suggested Qaddafi was in earnest.[45] Moreover, if this were not the case, Libya had inexplicably placed the burden of discerning its benign intentions on the very countries most likely to view its actions with suspicion. This too would have been an egregious mistake. In any event, statesmen must be judged by their results and not only by their professed or imagined intentions.

The mere suggestion of unifying Libya with Chad showed a staggering disregard for balance of power calculations. No great insight into the affairs of nations was required to understand that nothing could persuade Egypt and Sudan that the creation of a Libyan supra-state was in their interest. Nor would France or the United States be inclined to idly watch such a development. That Tripoli failed to perceive this or, perceiving it, failed to anticipate the wholly predictable reactions of the states in question, displayed a remarkable insularity. This was solipsism of the most dangerous kind, and brings to mind Kissinger's critique of the Schlieffen Plan: 'A minimum knowledge of history would have revealed that Great Britain would surely go to war if Belgium was invaded--a fact which seems to have totally eluded the Kaiser and the German general staff.'[46] In like manner, the consequences of

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[45] Neuberger, 49; Nolutshungu, 153.

[46] Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 205.

Libya's proposal to unite with Chad had somehow eluded the Colonel.

Egypt immediately began shipping arms to Habré, who was operating out of Sudan with the increasing support of his hosts.[47] Defending the Sudan from similar proposals of 'unity' was of even greater importance to Cairo. Egypt promised to invoke its 1976 mutual defence pact with Sudan should need arise.[48] In March, 1981, amidst fears of a Libyan plot to destabilize the Sudanese government, the Egyptian air force pointedly showed the flag in Khartoum. Border skirmishes between Habré's forces and Libyan/FAP units in August led to some thirty Libyan air raids against Sudanese villages in Darfur. The strikes themselves were relatively ineffectual and 'actually played into (the) hands' of Sudanese President Numeiri, who skillfully used the Libyan air threat to wring additional aid from Washington.[49]

The incoming Reagan White House did not need much convincing that the proposed unification was evidence of Qaddafi's expansionist ambitions. Washington's alarm was mitigated by a sense of the opportunity to turn the

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[47] A fact confirmed by Egyptian Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali in a news conference. "Egypt says it is assisting anti-Libyan rebels in Chad," New York Times, 17 March 1981.

[48] Olfat M. El Tohamy, "Egypt sees threat to Sudan after Libyan push into Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 23 January 1981; John Yemma, "Clashes loom between Libya, Sudan, Egypt over Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 20 April 1981.

[49] William D. Brewer, "The Libyan-Sudanese 'crisis' of 1981: Danger for Darfur and dilemma for the United States," Middle East Journal 36 (Spring 1982): 211-212.

tables on Tripoli. The CIA noted that 'Qaddafi's regional foes, including President Sadat, are focusing their resources on quietly bleeding Qaddafi at his most vulnerable point--his overextension in Chad and the danger this poses for him at home.' This strategy appealed to the Reagan Administration, which began sending its own covert aid to Habré so as to, in the words of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, 'increase the flow of pine boxes back to Libya.'[50]

Washington was not the only capital that saw 'unification' as a euphemism for expansionism. Within the Organization of African Unity Libya faced a torrent of criticism. OAU Chairman Siaka Stevens vigorously condemned the proposed union and called for Libya's withdrawal.[51] The OAU formally denounced the merger in a meeting at Lome, Togo.[52] Libyan diplomats were expelled from Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Upper Volta, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia and Mauritania.[53] Of these, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria broke relations completely. Several others broke ties later in the year, or, like Senegal, had already done so to protest Libyan

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[50] Bob Woodward, Veil: The secret wars of the CIA 1981-1987, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 96-97.

[51] SWB ME/6625/B/2, 17 January 1981.

[52] According to Qaddafi, the Lome conference had 'no legitimacy' and its resolutions 'will be ignored by us and will not be binding upon us.' SWB ME/6624/B/2, 16 January 1981.

[53] SWB ME/6626/B/1-3, 19 January 1981; George Joffé, "Qadafi's adventures in Chad," Middle East International, no. 142 (30 January 1981): 12.

subversion. Indeed, Senegal had taken the additional step of airlifting troops to Gambia in November, 1980, to deter Libya from attacking there as well.[54] Likewise, Nigeria moved the bulk of its army to its Chadian border and sharply increased its defence spending.[55] Nigeria also took the precaution of sharply increasing its defense spending.

Tripoli seemed bemused by Africa's furor. Only a year earlier many African states had joined Libya in pressuring the GUNT to admit Qaddafi's clients. Why then did unification prove so controversial?

Aside from the multitudinous balance of power calculations, there was a principle at stake which galvanized the African community. Hitherto, Libya's activities in Chad had enjoyed--deservedly or not--an anti-colonialist patina: Libya was ostensibly assisting a fraternal African people to 'liberate' themselves from the final vestiges of French imperialism. The unification decree irrevocably changed the perception of Libyan intervention. Territorial aggrandizement--which most African leaders now believed was Qaddafi's goal--violated the deepest taboo of post-Second World War African diplomacy which held that colonial borders were inviolable. Tripoli had already pushed the envelope by

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[54] "Around the world," New York Times, 6 November 1980.

[55] Gregory Jaynes, "Black Africa outraged by Qaddafi's Chad adventure," New York Times, 2 March 1981; Juan de Onis, "Nigeria puts new stress on defense to counter Libyan moves in Chad," New York Times, 15 January 1981.

occupying the Aouzou Strip. If full unification were countenanced the principle would be further eroded and, to an indeterminant degree, the entire continent would be destabilized.

It is difficult to suppose that Qaddafi was unaware he was trespassing on a sacrosanct principle of African security; nevertheless, he seemed unprepared for the vehemence with which the chorus of African states demanded his withdrawal from Chad. Reluctantly acknowledging the criticism, he sought to calm the 'fearful minds in Sudan, Niger, and other African countries' by suggesting there had been a 'misunderstanding' and that the Chadian people had not yet decided to unite with Libya but would be allowed to decide for themselves.[56] However, Tripoli simultaneously insisted that only Goukouni could ask the Libyan forces to leave.[57]

Many of the states alarmed by Qaddafi's idea of 'unity' looked to Paris for protection. Naturally, the French were gratified to see their African vocation vindicated. In addition, they were eager to give Qaddafi his comeuppance for engineering the precipitous decline of their own fortunes in Chad over the preceding two years. Paris could understand and even tolerate a friendly game of realpolitik, but the game had ceased to

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[56] SWB ME/6645/A/2, 10 February 1981; SWB ME/6676/A/1, 18 March 1981.

[57] SWB ME/6625/F/1, 17 January 1981.

be friendly. Indeed, the Libyan leader seemed to delight in slighting the French. During the recent campaign he had paid embarrassingly little heed to warnings from Paris and had brazenly dared France to intervene.[58] In late January he had the effrontery to issue a communique with Goukouni demanding that France recall all its soldiers from Africa.[59]

France seized the opportunity to reassert itself and humble this upstart North African. President Giscard d'Estaing cancelled a major oil deal with Libya and imposed an arms embargo, barring Tripoli from taking delivery of five new patrol boats.[60] The Foreign Minister and his deputy rushed to regional capitals to weigh the security implications of Libya's moves with local leaders.[61] French troops were despatched to the Central African Republic and military aid was offered to other threatened states.[62]

Notwithstanding its posturing, Paris recognized that the easiest way to force Qaddafi's hand would be to have

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[58] "France warns Libya on Chad intervention," New York Times, 14 December 1980; "Libya says its force in Chad could resist French move," New York Times, 23 January 1981.

[59] "Libya tells France to pull its troops out of Africa," New York Times, 24 January 1981.

[60] SWB ME/6662/i, 2 March 1981.

[61] Geoffrey Godsell, "Qaddafi plan for Chad merger sparks alarm in Europe, Africa," Christian Science Monitor, 9 January 1981.

[62] "France strengthens Africa force in reaction to Chad intervention," New York Times, 10 January 1981; "French deny Libyan charge of troop move near Chad," New York Times, 27 January 1981.

Goukouni request Libya's withdrawal.[63] In seeing this as a realistic possibility the French displayed a commanding grasp of Goukouni's character and predicament. By siding with Habré in 1979, Goukouni had demonstrated to Paris that his alliance with Qaddafi to that point was just a marriage of convenience. Moreover, the projected Chad-Libya merger placed Goukouni in an awkward position with most Chadians, none of whom were eager to be engulfed by Libya. Nor, for that matter, was Goukouni; only weeks earlier he had grimly described Libya's occupation of the Aouzou Strip as a *fait accompli*.[64] Moreover, his ally (and Vice-President) Kamougué immediately branded the union 'an impossible marriage.'[65] His discomfort with the relationship now rose to the surface, and within days of the unity announcement Goukouni hedged by making it conditional on approval in a referendum.[66]

Though aware of Goukouni's tenuous loyalty, the Libyans could not figure out how to reverse the erosion of their alliance. As Goukouni drifted towards the French orbit, it became less certain that the Libyans would leave if Goukouni asked them to do so. This had already been in doubt for some months. In early 1981

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[63] "Sudan and Egypt back Chad rebels against Libya," New York Times, 22 March 1981.

[64] "Libyans replace French in Chad's battered capital," New York Times, 28 December 1980.

[65] Richard Eder, "France acts to counter the Libyan move into Chad," New York Times, 9 January 1981.

[66] George Joffé, "Qadafi's adventures in Chad," Middle East International, no. 142 (30 January 1981): 12.

Qaddafi demanded nothing less than the renunciation of all French interests in Central Africa as his precondition for withdrawal:

> These forces will not be withdrawn until . . . the evacuation of the French forces from the Central African Republic and Cameroon, the evacuation of the French forces stationed in Senegal and Gabon and until France stops giving orders to its agents in Africa to threaten the security of Chad and its stability.[67]

Moreover, Tripoli asserted that Libya's departure--if it ever came--would be contingent upon the situation in Chad remaining favorable to Libyan interests.[68] That Qaddafi hinged Libya's withdrawal on factors Goukouni could not control showed that he would not abandon Chad willingly.

However, the Libyan leader had lost the initiative to the French, who deftly co-opted the Chadian warlord. In September Goukouni and Mitterand met in Paris and agreed on a tentative peace plan which France unveiled the following month. In addition, Paris began sending small arms and ammunition to Qaddafi's erstwhile client![69] Meanwhile, French diplomats spearheaded the formation of an OAU peace-keeping force for Chad. In November 1981, Goukouni formally demanded Libya withdraw

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[67] SWB ME/6644/A/4, 9 February 1981; see also SWB ME/6624/B/3, 16 January 1981, in which Qaddafi somewhat theatrically promised to wage war against imperialism (i.e., France) 'until they burn in the jungles of Africa together with their bases and their puppets.'

[68] SWB ME/6687/A/2, 31 March 1981.

[69] Edward Girardet, "France stepping up its role in Chad to support Woddei, undercut Libya," Christian Science Monitor, 29 October 1981; Geoffrey Godsell, "French support for Chad paying off--Libyans are leaving," Christian Science Monitor, 5 November 1981.

its troops (15,000 men by Qaddafi's estimate--nearly 20% of Libya's entire military).[70]

To everyone's surprise, Qaddafi agreed. Within two weeks not a single Libyan unit remained south of the Aouzou Strip. The alacrity of the LAF's departure was little understood at the time, and even afterwards was often ascribed to spurious motives. Libyan propagandists (and apologists) hailed the returning troops as 'peacekeepers' and praised the Colonel for having restored 'stability' to Chad.[71] Others ascribed the departure to Qaddafi's desire to be chairman of the OAU, which was imperiled by the occupation of Chad and which he did not obtain in any event, and to his fear of a joint U.S.-Egyptian attack.[72] This last suggestion hits closest to the mark. Operation Bright Star in November 1981, in which more than four thousand U.S. troops exercised with soldiers from Egypt, the Sudan, Oman, and Somalia, clearly signalled Washington's ability to

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[70] "Habre and Sudan pose threat," Jamahiriya Review no. 19 (December 1981): 11.

[71] See La Jamahiriya et la paix au Tchad, (La Jamahiriya Arabe Libyenne Populaire Socialiste, L'Information Extérieure: 1982); "Libya welcomes home its Chad `peacemakers'" Jamahiriya Review no. 19 (December 1981): 10-11; G. H. Jansen, "Trumping their aces," Middle East International no. 162 (13 November 1981): 5.

[72] Qaddafi was slated to be the next OAU chairman, but opposition to his installment was so fierce that three successive OAU summits collapsed (August 1982 in Tripoli; November 1982 in Tripoli; and May 1983 in Addis Ababa).

forcibly intervene in Chad should it choose.[73] Yet this does not tell the whole story.

The dissolution of Qaddafi's alliance with Goukouni made Libya's withdrawal all but inevitable. To remain in Chad against Goukouni's wishes would have dismembered their alliance and might even have resurrected the Goukouni-Habré coalition. Furthermore, remaining would increase the likelihood of aggressive U.S. or French intervention, and Qaddafi had no desire to enter a pitched battle with either. Withdrawing, on the other hand, might remind Goukouni where his bread was buttered. Indeed, the speed of Libya's departure (which deprived Chad of some vital infrastructure) suggested that Tripoli sought to precipitate an economic collapse for that very reason.

Though the decision to withdraw was strategically sound, it must have been a bitter one for Qaddafi. Libya's abrupt egress from Chad marked the end of an era. Never again would Qaddafi come as close to his goal of absorbing his southern neighbor.

1983: Back into the fray

Without Libyan support the fortunes of war (and diplomacy) turned against Goukouni. The OAU peacekeeping force which was supposed to ensure stability proved weak and ineffective. Habré's forces, which had regrouped and

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[73] Mary-Jane Deeb, "The primacy of Libya's national interest," In The green and the black, ed. René Lemarchand, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 34.

been resupplied, began pushing towards strategic towns. By the end of the year they had retaken Abéché and Faya-Largeau. In a war where both armies were evenly matched but neither was well disciplined, momentum was the key to victory. Goukouni's FAP broke and abandoned the territory it had conquered less than a year before. On June 7, 1982, Habré retook N'Djamena.

France tried in vain to reconcile the two Chadian warlords. Goukouni therefore made yet another dramatic reversal in policy, and--to Qaddafi's grim satisfaction--sought Libyan aid once more. With Qaddafi's blessing, Goukouni rallied his forces (3,000-4,000 men) in Bardaï, just south of the Aouzou Strip, where the Libyans began to re-equip and train them.[74]

In mid 1983 the invigorated FAP (accompanied by a cohort of Libyan advisors) pressed southward towards the vital but virtually indefensible town of Faya-Largeau. This was a probing action aimed primarily at the new government led by Francois Mitterand, which Qaddafi believed (with good reason) would be more tolerant of his sub-Saharan ambitions. During the last election the socialists had vowed to take a less "neo-colonial" approach to African problems (i.e., to undertake fewer military interventions) than did the Gaullists. Mitterand himself was a leading critic of Gaullist policy towards Chad, where four French military interventions

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[74] Jean R. Tartter, "National security," in Chad: A country study, ed. Thomas Collelo, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), 192.

since 1964 had failed to produce stability.[75] Memories of Vietnam and Algeria apparently weighed heavily on the new president.

On July 15, 1982, Mitterand lifted the arms embargo against Libya, unlocking the patrol boat deal as well as the sale of four Spanish Daphne-class submarines (which Paris had persuaded Madrid to suspend). The Libyans were delighted, and hailed the "closer ties" ushered in by Mitterand.[76] Tripoli promptly ordered an additional ten patrol boats, some Mirage F-1s and a number of Alouette III helicopters, thereby making itself an important French arms customer once again.[77]

For all of these reasons, Qaddafi believed France would avoid war in Chad at almost any cost. He therefore brushed aside a pointed warning from Mitterand and sent his air force to attack Faya-Largeau.[78] Adding insult to injury, Qaddafi countered with his own warning,

suggesting that Mitterand would be 'crazy' to send troops to Chad and that doing so could lead to 'massacres' which

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[75] Eric Pace, "Paris assailed on intervention in Chad, sometimes called 'France's Vietnam,'" New York Times, 29 April 1970.

[76] "Patrol boats from France," Jamahiriya Review no. 23 (April 1982): 7.

[77] Cooley, 210. How did the Colonel justify such dealings with the foremost neo-colonial power in Africa, whose record was 'black and dirty'? There was no ideological contradiction that Qaddafi could not solve by rhetoric: 'Brothers, we shall not confront France . . . We found that France was the only state that could, by its own will, conduct its foreign policy without permission from the USA' (SWB ME/6664/A/12, 4 March 1981).

[78] James Dorsey, "Libyan-backed rebels reportedly attack Chad in border region," Christian Science Monitor, 24 June 1983.

might end Mitterand's political career.[79] This threat was echoed by the Libyan ambassador to Paris.[80] In spite of these exchanges--each of which must have galled a nation so sensitive to questions of national honor--France reacted weakly. Mitterand ordered some 400 tons of military supplies airlifted to N'Djamena, but he resolutely refused to send ground troops or to permit a squadron of Jaguars based in Libreville, Gabon, to engage the Libyan air force.[81]

As a result, the air war over Faya-Largeau was one-sided. Libyan bombers, accompanied by ground attack fighters and helicopter gunships, flew dozens of sorties against troops whose only defence consisted of captured SAM-7 missiles.[82] On June 24 the city fell.[83] With Faya-Largeau secured, Goukouni's soldiers launched a coordinated air-land strike to the south, capturing Kalait, Oum Chalouba, and Abéché on July 8. Although a FANT counterattack recaptured Abéché four days later, Goukouni's thrust threatened to sunder Habré's strategic corridor to Sudan, cutting off the flow of vital

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[79] As quoted in Deeb, 155.

[80] Mohamed Selhami, "La Libye n'intervient pas," Jeune Afrique no. 1174 (6 July 1983): 31.

[81] William Echikson, "France provides support--but not troops-to Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 9 August 1983.

[82] "Libya threatens to shoot down American Awacs," Times (London), 9 August 1983; "Libyan pilot tells of Chad raids," Christian Science Monitor (9 August 1983).

[83] Francois Soudan, "La bataille de Faya," Jeune Afrique no. 1174 (6 July 1983): 29.

matériel.

On July 30, 1982, Habré mounted a brief counteroffensive and recaptured Faya-Largeau. This forced Qaddafi to make a choice he would undoubtedly have preferred to avoid. Libya could intervene directly and risk French retaliation, or it could continue to rely upon Goukouni and risk further setbacks. Qaddafi made his decision swiftly. As Libyan Tu-22s resumed pummelling the city with fragmentation and phosphorous bombs, a mechanized battalion was despatched to help in the siege.[84] Soon, according to the U.S. State Department, between 1500 and 2000 Libyan troops ringed Faya Largeau.[85]

Qaddafi, aware that to admit his troops were again campaigning in Chad would be to invite another round of diplomatic protests (and perhaps worse), simply lied. There were no Libyans in Chad, said the Colonel, and there would be none if it were left to Tripoli. On the other hand, 'all foreign intervention in Chad will be considered by us as an act of war against Libya.'[86]

This was the rhetorical culmination of the 'Qaddafi Doctrine' which, as noted at the beginning of this study, generously endowed Libya with global interests, universal values, and the right to intervene wherever it saw fit.

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[84] Tartter, 193; cf. Kenneth Watman and Dean Wilkening, U.S. Regional deterrence strategies (Santa Monica, RAND: 1995).

[85] Times (London), 9 August 1983.

[86] William Echikson, "France and Libya facing off in Chad's civil war," Christian Science Monitor, 8 July 1983.

However, it was one thing to 'talk the talk' of a Great Power; to behave like one was something else entirely. The re-introduction of Libyan ground forces to Chad added a new dimension to the conflict that soon brought counterproductive consequences upon Tripoli; this was Qaddafi's fifth major policy mistake.

Not cowed by Qaddafi's threat and unswayed by his protestations, several states lent support to Habré. Zaire sent some 2,000 airborne soldiers to N'Djamena.[87] Many diplomats expected Egypt and Sudan to follow suit, though in the end their aid to Habré remained covert.[88] Gabon appealed for French intervention. So too did the United States. The Reagan administration was determined to, at the very least, neutralize Libya's air advantage and give Habré's forces a fighting chance. But the French dithered. Impatient with the Quai d'Orsay's temporizing, the White House took matters into its own hands and announced it would provide Chad with anti-aircraft missiles and instructors.

Rattled by this Yankee intrusion into its traditional sphere of influence, France immediately announced it would contribute anti-aircraft guns (although it still refused to commit its Gabon-based Jaguars to combat) and pledged more than $40 million

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[87] Tartter, 193.

[88] James Dorsey, "Libyan-backed rebels reportedly attack Chad in border region," Christian Science Monitor, 24 June 1983.

worth of supplies.[89] Yet the American weapons arrived first, symbolically denoting the transfer of leadership in Chad's defence. In addition, Washington vowed to more than double its military aid to Chad (to $25 million). The U.S. Navy stationed the aircraft carrier Eisenhower off the Libyan coast. The Pentagon announced the deployment of two AWACS to Sudan, along with F-15 escorts, refueling tankers, and reconnaissance aircraft.[90]

Libya's response to this outflux of American aid was to step up its air attacks on Faya-Largeau.[91] Moreover, JANA announced: 'The Libyan Air Force has been given orders to strike at US AWACS planes whenever it becomes evident to the Libyan Air Force that they affect Libyan territory.'[92] By the standards of normal diplomacy, this was an extraordinarily rash threat. Libya was signalling a willingness to risk war with the United States merely to retain a tactical advantage in northern Chad. One can

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[89]"U.S. F-14s chase Libyan jets over Mediterranean," International Herald Tribune, 4 August 1983; Gary Marx, "French and US weapons to help battle Libyan jets in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 3 August 1983.

[90] Gary Marx, "Libya's blitz into northern Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 8 August 1983; Herb Boyd, "Chad: A civil war without end?" Journal of African Studies 10, no. 4 (Winter 1983-84): 122.

[91] Gary Marx, "French and US weapons to help battle Libyan jets in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 3 August 1983.

[92] Linda Feldman, "Libyan pilot tells of Chad raids," Christian Science Monitor, 9 August 1983. Libya also threatened strikes against any U.S. ships operating in the Gulf of Sidra. See Gary Marx, "US steps up role in Chad war," Christian Science Monitor, 5 August 1983.

scarcely imagine any other state in the international system issuing such a bellicose challenge to a superpower; that Libya's challenge failed to generate much media attention suggests that most observers found the threat not only presumptuous but wearisome. It certainly failed to deter Washington, and doubtlessly reinforced the Reagan Administration's anti-Libyan predispositions.

America's activism aimed not to supplant France but to spur it into action, and in this it was largely successful. *Le Monde*, for example, was already questioning whether France was being squeezed out of Chad by Washington.[93] Infuriated by Reagan's apparent disregard for diplomatic sensitivities, Mitterand was reluctantly compelled to defend France's African vocation.[94] Consequently, only a day after the Foreign Ministry averred that France had no intention of intervening, the French Defence Minister, Charles Hernu, abruptly announced that 'whatever the Libyans (or perhaps more appropriately, the Americans) do, we will match.'[95] On August 10-13, French transports could be heard

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[93] Robert M. Gates, From the shadows, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 254; William Echikson, "France provides support--but not troops--to Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 9 August 1983.

[94] In a news conference, President Reagan bluntly expressed his surprise that France refused to commit its air power. Daniel Southerland, "`AWACS diplomacy' reassures friends, warns adversaries," Christian Science Monitor, 15 August 1983.

[95] William Echikson, "France points finger at Qaddafi," Christian Science Monitor, 11 August 1983.

rumbling over N'Djamena, ferrying thousands of troops in an undertaking dubbed Operation Manta. Within four days one thousand French troops were on the ground. Another twenty-five hundred soon followed, as did ground support aircraft and attack helicopters. The French units secured the approaches to the capital and then took up positions along the 15th parallel.

The French were too late to prevent Libya from recapturing Faya-Largeau, which fell on August 10, 1983. Indeed, by making the 15th parallel their line of defence--the parallel lies considerably to the south of Faya-Largeau--the French in effect conceded the devastated northern city to Qaddafi. The Libyan garrison at Faya-Largeau quickly swelled to some 6,000 men. Nevertheless, the Libyan offensive was irretrievable. Attrition tactics proved counterproductive. In January 1984 Goukouni's men broke the *de facto* cease-fire by raiding a FANT position at Ziguey. While retreating, the rebels managed to shoot down a French Jaguar sent to strafe their column. This small triumph soured when France moved its 'security zone' northwards to the 16th parallel and tripled the number of its combat aircraft in Chad.[96] France had belatedly shown it could hold its own at coercive diplomacy.

Much of the credit for undoing Libya's 1983 offensive must go to the Reagan Administration.

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[96] William Echikson, "Risk of direct French-Libyan confrontation grows in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 31 January 1984.

Qaddafi's preoccupation with the French dimension of the conflict led him to underestimate America's relevance to the war. He failed to foresee that Washington's activism would oblige Paris to support Habré in order to prevent further encroachments upon France's African vocation. Nevertheless, to ascribe Libya's reversal to the vagaries of Great Power rivalries alone is to miss a larger and more instructive point. Libyan national security policy had once again produced the opposite of its intended result: rather than exploiting France's absence, Qaddafi re-entrenched the French in his backyard. Though its failure arose from a multitude of specific conditions, the 1983 offensive was thus emblematic of Qaddafi's counterproductive behavior throughout the war.

Regrouping

Chad was now carved into French and Libyan spheres with the 16th parallel demarcating the border between north and south, precisely the arrangement Qaddafi allegedly proposed to the French in 1978. French officials expressed their hopes that Qaddafi would be satisfied with what he had captured so that the cease-fire would hold. This was presumably enough for the French. President Mitterand, if only by his refusal to help Habré mount an offensive, appeared predisposed to accept a Libyan presence in northern Chad (in fact, Mitterand was rumored to believe that partition might be

the only viable solution to Chad's civil war).[97]

But Qaddafi was no longer interested in a Franco-Libyan condominium, if indeed he ever had been. He simply wanted the French to leave so he could get on with the business of dominating Chad. Moreover, Qaddafi evidently realized (quite correctly) that time was on his side. With the French in Chad and the stalemate holding, American pressure on Paris was temporarily neutralized. For their part, the French were eager to reach an understanding, and this eagerness conveyed an advantage to Tripoli. Qaddafi made this clear by demanding Habré's resignation be part of any negotiated settlement, a condition he knew Paris would have to reject (as it did).[98]

Still, by professing a willingness to negotiate and by scrupulously avoiding military engagements, Qaddafi provided Mitterand the superficial calm necessary to proclaim Operation Manta a success. The French President, who was clearly looking to egress from Chad at the earliest possible opportunity, eventually abandoned the idea of forging a reconciliation between Goukouni and Habré and set about cutting a separate deal with Qaddafi.

In September 1984, Libya and France agreed to simultaneously withdraw their troops from Chad.

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[97] William Echikson, "French forces await Qaddafi's next move in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 15 August 1983.

[98] William Echikson, "French push for Chad solution gets stuck in the diplomatic sand," Christian Science Monitor, 13 February 1984.

Satisfied once Libya made a token withdrawal, France removed all of its troops by November 10, 1984, expecting that Libya would follow suit. However, U.S. satellite intelligence soon revealed that substantial Libyan forces remained in Chad--a fact that the State Department trumpeted much to the embarrassment of the Quai d'Orsay. Mitterand made things worse by suggesting that Libya had left relatively few forces behind; not only did the Parisian papers discover that the real force level was three to four times higher than Mitterand's estimation, but the fact that this information was leaked to them by French intelligence sources suggested significant disgruntlement within the government.[99] A frantic summit with Qaddafi in Crete availed nothing.[100] Mitterand endured scathing criticism in the National Assembly, his approval rating plummeted, and several African states boycotted a Franco-African summit to show their displeasure with what they perceived as an abdication of France's responsibility towards Africa.[101]

There is no reason to believe that Libya ever intended to honor its agreement with France and though

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[99] William Echikson, "French confident about Libyans in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 1 October 1984; William Echikson, "Mitterand gives peace--and Qaddafi--a chance in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 26 November 1984.

[100] Indeed, Libya later claimed that the French gave Tripoli a *carte blanche* at the summit to intervene in Chad as they saw fit. SWB ME/0644 A/4, 20 December 1989.

[101] William Echikson, "France's travails in Africa have implications for United States," Christian Science Monitor, 13 December 1984.

Mitterand probably suspected as much, it seems he was determined to escape from Chad at almost any cost. On the face of things, this amounted to a coup for Qaddafi, who no doubt considered himself a master of realpolitik.

Yet here again was an astounding failure to grasp the consequences of state behavior. In cuckolding the French, Qaddafi humiliated the Western power most inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Thus, instead of widening an already gaping policy rift between the U.S. and its European allies, Tripoli made Mitterand look foolish. The ramifications of this short-sighted ploy would rebound against Libya for years to come. The immediate effect of Qaddafi's duplicity was to make it impossible to capitalize on France's withdrawal, since the political pressure on Mitterand was now such that any further deterioration in Habré's position would have to be met by force.[102] Constrained by this web of his own devising, Qaddafi had little else to do except to consolidate his position in northern Chad and bide his time. During this period the LAF constructed a regional headquarters in Wadi Doum, with an enormous airfield to accommodate ground support aircraft.[103]

Qaddafi made less effective use of this interlude in terms of improving relations with his ostensible allies. Without an active war to unite them, the various factions

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[102] Nolutshungu, 212-213.

[103] David Willis, "Qaddafi pursues dual strategy in effort to expand Libya's influence in Chad," Christian Science Monitor, 26 June 1985.

that formed the rump GUNT began to fall out with each other and personal rivalries (notably between Goukouni and CDR leader Al-Shaykh Ibn Omar) became disruptive.[104] In addition, familiarity between the Libyans and their clients bred contempt. This was due in part to latent racism on the part of the Libyans, who viewed their Chadian neighbors as something less than the 'brothers' Qaddafi proclaimed them to be.[105] This was an elitism made all too clear by regulations that allowed Libyan men to marry Chadian women, but denied Libyan women to Chadian men.[106]

The FANT also took advantage of the relative lull over the next two years to re-organize and re-equip. In this they were aided by the Reagan Administration which was nearing the apex of its anti-Libyan activities and therefore happy to provide tactical advice, intelligence, and a stream of small armaments, most notably anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles.[107] Though the U.S. offered big-ticket items as well, the FANT judiciously selected arms appropriate for a mobile guerrilla war.

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[104] Nolutshungu, 190-193.

[105] "Libyan offensive deep into Chad is described as military disaster," New York Times, 21 April 1979.

[106] Nolutshungu, 203.

[107] Kenneth M. Pollack, "The influence of Arab culture on Arab military effectiveness," PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 1996, 704. Pollack's analysis of Libyan combat performance in Chad is unsurpassed for detail.

The last hurrah

In February 1986, after a year of relative calm, Libya and the GUNT launched a fresh offensive with an attack on Kouba-Olanga, followed by an assault on Oum Chalouba. This was a violation of the "red line" which French forces had established along the 16th parallel as a zone of disengagement between north and south. France responded with uncharacteristic sharpness by bombing the Libyan airstrip at Wadi Doum--a sure sign that Mitterand was still smarting from the battering he received after unilaterally withdrawing from Chad. The Libyans were undeterred, and retaliated by bombing N'Djamena airport. This was Qaddafi's sixth fateful miscalculation. France replied by airlifting troops into the capital, and Habré's forces retook Oum Chalouba on February 14.[108] A second Libyan probing action in March was also repulsed.

Mitterand, who could not afford to look weak, ordered French ground and air units back to Chad. This deployment, known as Operation Epervier (Sparrowhawk), grew in strength from an original contingent of 1,400 men to nearly 2,000 soldiers.

For the second time in less than three years, Qaddafi had triggered the return of French troops to Chad. This development was adverse, to say the least, to his war aim of ejecting the French from Chad. One can only speculate as to why the Colonel felt February was a

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[108] George Henderson, "His last chance?," Middle East International (21 February 1986): 9-10.

propitious time for renewing operations in Chad. Perhaps, given that in early 1986 his conflict with the United States was nearing its crescendo, Qaddafi vaguely hoped that stirring things up in Chad might induce France to bridle Washington. This was not without a kernel of logic, since as it became more and more evident that the United States was seeking some sort of military show down with Libya, Mitterand may have feared that the United States would again undercut France in Chad. Whatever the Colonel's reckoning (which historians may never retrieve), Operation Epervier marked the beginning of the end for Libya's war in Chad.

Faced once more with the risk of war with France, Libya abandoned its planned offensive--which was just as well, because the Libyan-GUNT coalition was rapidly beginning to unravel through a string of defections to Habré. Kamougué, for instance, left after Goukouni missed a March reconciliation meeting with Habré in Congo, perhaps because Libya would not allow him to attend.[109] Moreover, in August 1986 tensions peaked between Goukouni and Al-Shaykh Ibn Omar, leader of the pro-Libyan CDR.[110] With less than 3,000 men, the CDR was far more dependent upon Libya than was Goukouni's 5,000 strong FAP. A skirmish broke out between the FAP and the CDR at Fada. In a virtual replay of 1979 the Libyans,

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[109] Nolutshungu, 212-213.

[110] A post he received after Asil Achmat, former leader of the CDR, died in a freak accident with an airplane propeller in July 1982.

rather than remaining neutral, sided with the CDR. The FAP, which constituted nearly two-thirds of the GUNT, retreated to its bases in the Tibesti mountains.

The break with the FAP was compounded by what would be the Libyan leader's seventh major self-inflicted injury in Chad. Qaddafi did the worst thing possible under the circumstances: he arrested Goukouni to ensure his 'loyalty.' News of Goukouni's arrest soon reached Chad, as did reports that the rebel leader had been shot and seriously wounded while resisting arrest. This news made the loss of the FAP irretrievable.[111] Habré seized upon this strategic windfall by proposing a cease-fire to the FAP in October. The FAP accepted, and from then it was only a matter of time before the two former antagonists became an anti-Libyan alliance. Goukouni's FAP began to cooperate with the FANT against Libyan troops and the CDR.[112]

In mid-November, Al-Shaykh Ibn Omar was "elected" President of the GUNT, which the Libyans vainly hoped would lend some legitimacy to their position. But Qaddafi knew that Goukouni's supporters in the FAP would have to be smashed if he were to continue to control northern Chad. Thus, in mid-December the LAF launched a two-pronged attack, led by T-62s covered by heavy air

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[111] Yehudit Ronen, "Libya," in Middle East contemporary survey: 1986, volume 10, ed. Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 519.

[112] Although Goukouni was later rehabilitated by Tripoli, he never regained his former political stature.

support, against the FAP in Tibesti. The first column (800 men) struck at Bardai on the northern edge of the Tibesti mountains. Though it initially caught the FAP off guard, the attack was soundly repulsed on December 12. The second column (1200 men) looped through Niger and attacked Zouar in southwestern Tibesti. Despite its superior weaponry, the Libyan force took heavy casualties in capturing the town.[113]

In January 1987, Habré sent a relief column to reinforce the FAP in the Tibesti region. The combined FAP-FANT forces liberated Zouar, depriving Tripoli of a key foothold in the Tibesti region.[114] The Chadian victory was all the more impressive since Habré's relief column was a diversion. The real Chadian thrust was directed against Fada. On January 2, 1987, Habré's men swarmed Fada's defenders using light Toyota trucks sprouting anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, recoilless rifles and machine guns. Enveloped by a series of pincer movements, the torpid LAF armored units were utterly routed.

Libya's losses were heavier than any the LAF had ever suffered. At least 700 soldiers (out of a garrison of around 1,200) were killed, and hundreds of armored

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[113] Hugo Sada, "Ce que feront Paris et Washington," Jeune Afrique no. 1358 (14 January 1987): 31.

[114] Pollack, 704-705.

vehicles were destroyed or captured.[115] The regime's wrath fell upon the Libyan commander, Col. Mohammed Abbas Al Mabrouk, who escaped from Fada by air at the last minute. He was taken to Sebha, court martialed, and executed.[116]

Aside from shooting the officers, Tripoli was at a loss as to how to deal with this turn of events. The regime's confusion immediately became apparent as the foreign ministry and the military worked at cross purposes. Two days after the loss of Fada, at the very moment Libyan diplomats in Paris were delivering a demarche insisting that the *de facto* border along the 16th parallel be respected (ignoring the fact that Libya and the FAP repeatedly violated it the previous year), a squadron of Libyan MiG-23s were attacking Arada--well south of the parallel. Brushing aside the Libyan demarche, France dismissed the air strike as an "insect's bite" and responded by bombing radar installations at Wadi Doum, thus blinding its air defenses.[117] After further Libyan incursions into the "red zone," the French air force returned (on February 18, 1986) and cratered

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[115] For a detailed but inflated battle damage estimate, see "International defense digest: Chadian offensives," International Defense Review 20, no. 5 (May 1987): 537. Pollack's figures are more reasonable, as are his estimates of the various parties' troop strength, and generally correspond to Nolutshungu's (Pollack, 704-705; Nolutshungu, 217-218; cf. Tartter, 194-198).

[116] Francois Soudan, "Tchad-Libye: La bataille de Fada," Jeune Afrique no. 1366 (11 March 1987): 17; Lemarchand, 12.

[117] Hugo Sada, "France-Libye: Jusqu'où Paris peut aller," Jeune Afrique no. 1359 (21 January 1987): 31.

the runway.[118]

Habré's men then lured a relief column out of Wadi Doum, which they ambushed and devastated at Bir Kora; a second relief column, sent to rescue the first, was also decimated.[119] Libya lost roughly 800 men and 100 T-55 tanks.[120] Four days later Habré personally led his forces in an attack on Wadi Doum itself. The base fell in just four hours. Libyan losses were again staggering: some 1200 dead and 400 captured out of a garrison of more than 4,000.[121] The losses in *matériel*--tanks, armored personnel carriers, jets, helicopters, missile batteries, and ammunition--were even higher. Estimated construction costs of the air base alone ran as high as $500 million.[122]

This time Qaddafi did not have the luxury of executing the base commander to ease the sting of

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[118] Henderson, op. cit., 9.

[119] According to one former Libyan army officer, Qaddafi took personal command of operations in Chad after the debacle at Fada, and it was he who ordered the counterattack that resulted in the disastrous engagements at Bir Kora. See Kadafi/Tchad: Ingérence, agresion, occupation (Livre blanc, èdité au Tchad: July 1987).

[120] The best account of which is found in Pollack, 705.

[121] Years later, evidence of the immense carnage at Wadi Doum was still horrific. See Lt.Col. Nielly, "Rencontres entre Marsouins et Epervier," Armées d'Aujourd'hui no. 184 (October 1993): 76.

[122] "Chadian offensives," International Defense Review 20, no. 5 (May 1987): 537; George Henderson, "Qadhafi's final curtain?," Middle East International (3 April 1987): 10.

defeat.[123] The Libyan general staff surely recognized at this point that Faya Largeau was now indefensible, and that Libya must abandon its position in central Chad (whether Qaddafi also realized this, or had to be led to that conclusion, is a question for future historians). In any event, the decision was made and the LAF fell back from Faya Largeau to the Aouzou Strip. Tripoli then systematically reinforced its forces in the Strip until they numbered more than 12,000 troops--more than a third of the entire Libyan army.[124] Qaddafi's resolve to retain the Aouzou Strip had not waned.

In late July, after a respite of three months, Habré's forces renewed their offensive. After a few minor actions the Chadians engaged a Libyan reinforced armored brigade on August 8, 1987 at Oumchi. The Libyans were again routed (est. 650 killed, 150 captured) and the Chadians easily overran the oasis of Aouzou. After two unsuccessful counterattacks, the Libyans managed to recapture Aouzou at the end of the month and raided the town of Ounianga Kabir.[125]

Scarcely a week later, Habré delivered the most decisive blow of the war. Several hundred kilometers inside the southern border of Libya proper lay Maatan al-

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[123] The Libyan commander was captured during the battle. Ironically, he soon joined an exiled opposition group, the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, and became the leader of its military wing.

[124] Pollack, 706.

[125] George Henderson, "Habré strikes back," Middle East International no. 308 (12 September 1987): 11.

Sarra, the LAF's principal base of air operations against Chad following the fall of Wadi Doum. The soldiers stationed there felt themselves distanced from the war in Chad; they were unprepared, both psychologically and militarily, to defend themselves when the Chadians struck. The perimeter defenses collapsed almost instantly, and soon the entire base was in Chadian hands. Once again, Libya's losses were extraordinary (1700 dead, 300 captured out of a garrison of roughly 2,500). In Tripoli, the state-run news agency insisted that Maatan al-Sarra had warded off its attackers, but the admission that foreign forces had penetrated Libya was, like the attack itself, unprecedented.[126] Shrewd Libyans must have discerned that the war effort was in serious trouble.

Though he had often decried the imperialist peril along his southern border, it is doubtful that Qaddafi ever seriously entertained the notion that his war in Chad might spill over into Libya. That he feared the French is true, but the French had never taken the offensive. As for the Chadians, they had always crumbled in the face of Libyan artillery and air power. (In dismissing Habré's offensive potential Qaddafi was not alone: the Chadians themselves, to say nothing of their French and American advisors, were frankly amazed at their own success.)

Nevertheless, Qaddafi was now facing a real war.

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[126] ibid.

Behind him stood a demoralized army that had lost some 5,000 men in less than a year. There stood as well a populace that, having sent its sons off to die in an unpopular war, was growing bitter and disillusioned.[127] Qaddafi's nebulous justifications for the war, which had been tolerated during the years of few casualties, suddenly looked vacuous in the cold light of 1987. Never had Libyan national security policy appeared more bankrupt, nor its architect more irrational.

Early in this study we posited that the perpetuation of irrationality presupposes an absence of political accountability. In a dictatorship, where the mechanisms that ensure accountability are either defunct or non-existent, it often falls to the generals to restore the ship of state to an even keel in times of national crisis. The loss of Maatan al-Sarra was the final proof that Libya was caught in such a crisis, and (in the absence of documentary evidence) one can only speculate as to the exchanges that passed between Qaddafi and his generals in the following days. Whether they had the temerity to point out that the war was going badly or maintained a deferential silence, the unspoken threat of

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[127] By most accounts, Libyans were never enthused about the war in Chad. See, for example, John Davis, Libyan politics: Tribe and revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 114; "Libya: Blind confidence," Africa Confidential 28 no.4 (18 February 1987): 3; SWB ME/0821 B/5, 20 July 1990. 'Most Libyans tend to be quite indifferent to the Aouzou strip, which they regard as a piece of desert not worth bloodshed' (El-Kikhia, 130).

a coup d'etat hung heavily in the air.[128] On September 11, 1987, Libya agreed to an OAU-proposed ceasefire. Qaddafi's Vietnam was drawing to an end.

Closure

The terms of the cease-fire obligated Habré to forego further attacks on the Aouzou Strip. This allowed Qaddafi to strengthen his toehold there, and he accordingly trebled his armored forces near the Chadian border during the winter of 1987-1988 and enlarged a runway at Tuomo, in Niger, from whence his air force could reach southern Chad.[129] Yet when spring came he did not launch a new campaign. This was a sagacious decision, one that gave the LAF time to recover, kept the French position static, and allowed Qaddafi to probe for Habré's weaknesses.

As for the status of the Aouzou Strip, Qaddafi was in no hurry to permanently resolve the question; after all, the territory was still occupied by Libyan forces and the longer they remained, the more likely that the territory would eventually be recognized as Libya's. He was nevertheless willing to go through the motions of diplomacy. In accordance with the ceasefire package Libya began discussing its territorial claims with an OAU ad hoc committee on Chad as early as September 1987,

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[128] "Libya/Chad: A fragile peace," Africa Confidential 28, no. 19 (23 September 1987): 2.

[129] E.A. Wayne, "Libyan border activity sends mixed messages to Chad, West," Christian Science Monitor, 8 March 1988.

though the Libyan delegation steadfastly refused to consider international arbitration.[130]

This was enough to convince the French to keep Habré on a short leash. The Chadian leader was eager to complete the liberation of the Aouzou Strip, but France refused to provide him with the requisite air cover. Consequently, Habré had to tolerate a long string of Libyan ceasefire violations.[131] At the urging of Paris and the OAU, he restored diplomatic ties with Libya in June 1988--one month after Qaddafi cagily declared a unilateral truce and offered to recognize the Habré government. This paved the way for a meeting (albeit an unsuccessful one) with Qaddafi in Bamako, Mali on July 21-22, 1989, to discuss a settlement. The following month, on August 31, 1989, the foreign ministers of Libya and Chad signed the Algiers Accord, pledging to work out a settlement by the following year. Failing that, they agreed to submit their dispute over the Aouzou Strip to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

From Libya's point of view, the Algiers Accord had the admirable quality of postponing a final settlement for at least a year and probably much longer, since the case would presumably sit before the ICJ for some time.

Tripoli therefore continued to stall, using a translation

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[130] Ronen 1989, 556.

[131] There were 272 violations by July 1988 and more than 450 by January 1989, most of which were reconnaissance flights. "Chad: Full circle," NFSL Newsletter no. 64 (January 1989): 3; "Chad/Libya: Gadaffi turns diplomat," Africa Confidential 29, no. 13 (1 July 1988): 4.

error between the French and Arabic texts of the accord to keep discussions knotted around prisoner-of-war issues rather than territorial compromise.[132] At one point Libya sought to extend the deadline set at Algiers by another year so as to further delay things.[133] It gradually became clear to journalists, as well as to Habré's cabinet, that Libya's participation in the diplomatic channel was a purely diversionary measure intended to preoccupy N'Djamena while Tripoli developed its new military option.[134]

By the same token, the startling concessions Qaddafi made in Algiers served to deflect attention from Libya as the Colonel gradually applied military pressure to Habré. Although Tripoli had promised to withdraw Libyan forces from the Aouzou Strip and allow them to be replaced by an African observer force, the modalities of withdrawal were relentlessly disputed until Tripoli had essentially reneged on this commitment.

The resumption of conventional military operations was obviously far too risky; another disaster like the destruction of Maatan al-Sarra might push the LAF into rebellion. A low-intensity conflict was needed, preferably one with a measure of deniability. Qaddafi's

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[132] "Libyan interference in Chad halts Algiers Accord," NFSL Newsreport 7, no. 1 (January-February 1990): 4-5.

[133] SWB ME/0725 B/1, 29 March 1990.

[134] SWB ME/0649 B/1, 29 December 1989; George Henderson, "Warning for Qadhafi," Middle East International no. 296 (20 March 1987): 9.

answer was to use his Islamic Legion (an unhappy band of press-ganged Muslims who had travelled to Libya in hopes of working in the oil fields) to pester Chad with guerrilla operations from Darfur province in Sudan.

Qaddafi's guerrilla war might have fizzled out were it not for the timely defection of Idriss Déby, who had hitherto served under Habré as army chief of staff. Jealous of Déby's popularity, Habré deliberately marginalized the young general and soon gained his enmity. After failing to unseat Habré in February 1989, Déby fled to Sudan with a sizable portion of Habré's followers. Déby readily allied himself with the Islamic Legion, thus providing Qaddafi with a viable means of pressuring Habré.[135]

A series of bitter skirmishes ensued. On October 30, 1989, Chadian forces destroyed an Islamic Legion stronghold at the Bamissi oasis on the Chad-Sudan border.[136] On March 25, 1990, some 2000 of Déby's men occupied a number of Chadian border posts. The timing of this incursion was no accident, since the OAU ad hoc committee on the Aouzou Strip was due to convene the next day in Libreville. After repelling the incursion Habré's forces captured a Libyan convoy inside Darfur in May, which became another sticking point between N'Djamena and

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[135] SWB ME/0783iii, 8 June 1990.

[136] SWB ME/0605 B/3, 4 November 1989.

Tripoli.[137] Negotiations seemed increasingly pointless. On August 31, 1990, Libya submitted its case for the Aouzou Strip to the International Court of Justice with the sardonic observation that it had become 'difficult to reach an agreement' bilaterally.[138]

In the following weeks things fell apart. France refused to intercede on Habré's behalf, and Déby's forces (well armed by Libya) won the day.[139] On December 1, 1990, Habré fled the country. Déby assumed control of Chad.

This was, as one periodical wrote, 'sweet revenge' for Qaddafi.[140] Déby's success placed a pro-Libyan government in N'Djamena, a goal Libya had sought for two decades. Some 400 Libyan POWs were released to Libya, and the bodies of several prominent Libyans killed in Chad were also returned. Even Washington concluded Qaddafi had won, and the U.S. therefore evacuated the Libyan opposition guerrillas that the CIA had been training in Chad and that Qaddafi wanted repatriated.[141]

Was Déby's triumph Qaddafi's victory as well? With time it became clear that it was not. Once in power,

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[137] Peter Hiett, "Libya and Chad: Flare up," Middle East International no. 376, (25 May 1990): 12-13.

[138] SWB ME/0865ii, 10 September 1990.

[139] SWB ME/0758 B/3-4, 8 May 1990; "Libyan-backed rebels oust Chad's president," NFSL Newsreport 7, no. 6 (November-December 1990): 4-5; Nolutshungu, 242-243.

[140] "Libya: A good year for Gadaffi," Africa Confidential 31, no. 25 (21 December 1990): 1-2.

[141] Africa Confidential 31, no. 25 (21 December 1990): 1-2.

Déby no longer felt beholden to the Colonel. There was no talk of union between the 'fraternal peoples.' Déby rejected Libya's claim to the Aouzou Strip. And while Libya did not re-establish a military presence in Chad, France retained its own military mission.[142]

In fact, the eminently pragmatic French deftly made Qaddafi's man their own. Not only did Operation Epervier survive the Habré-Déby transition, but military ties between France and the new government actually grew. In January 1992, when Habré's followers mounted an anti-Déby insurgency, France sent troops in a move that--though ostensibly aimed at protecting French nationals in Chad--amounted to tacit support of the new government. Months later, in September 1992, France supplemented Epervier with a military assistance mission to assist in the professionalization of Chad's armed forces.[143] Furthermore, France kept the Déby government afloat through annual grants of $18.5 million.[144] France's on-going military presence was a bitter pill for the Libyan leader.[145]

The advent of the Déby government did not bring

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[142] The French mission continued until 1996, when it died in Paris at the hands of the accountants. See Col. Jean-Marc Jantet, "Dispositif épervier," Armées d'aujourd'hui (March 1994): 42.

[143] Romain Lefebvre, "Au bonheur des 'DAMI' . . . ," Armées d'aujourd'hui no. 196 (December-January 1995): 70-73.

[144] Mark Huband, "Libya and Sudan extend influence," Christian Science Monitor, 24 June 1992.

[145] FBIS-NES-94-108, 6 June 1994, 15-17.

Qaddafi a reprieve on the Aouzou Strip. On February 3, 1994, the ICJ rejected Libya's claim to the Aouzou Strip in a 16 to 1 ruling.[146] Qaddafi, perhaps because Libya had won its previous disputes before the ICJ, had apparently not decided in advance whether he would respect the court's ruling. JANA and Libyan state television passed over the ruling in silence that evening.[147] For the next few weeks Libya blew hot and cold. Immediately after the ICJ's ruling, some 400 Chadians in Libya were reportedly arrested, apparently to serve as bargaining pieces.[148] Moreover, Tripoli reinforced its forces in the Aouzou Strip.[149] Finally, Libya demanded a *quid pro quo* from the Chad: the return of 500 Libyan POWs who joined the Libyan opposition and were evacuated to the U.S. when the Habré regime fell.[150] Since Chad was patently unable to fulfill this demand even if it wished to do so, Tripoli was in fact threatening to ignore the ICJ's decision.

Then, unexpectedly, Qaddafi declared his conflict with Chad 'definitely finished,' and sent his foreign

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[146] "Court rejects Libya claim on Chad," International Herald Tribune, 4 February 1994.

[147] Christian Chartier, "La bande d'Aozou est attribuée au Tchad par la Cour internationale de justice," Le Monde, 5 February 1994.

[148] George Joffé, "Aozou setback," Middle East International, 18 March 1994.

[149] "Tchad: la Libye renforcerait son dispositif militaire a Aozou," Le Monde, 15 February 1994.

[150] George Joffé, "Aouzou setback," Middle East International, 18 March 1994.

minister to work out the details of Libya's withdrawal.[151] On June 3, 1994, Déby paid an official visit to Libya in gratitude. The following day Libya and Chad signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation two days later.

Qaddafi's sudden change of heart was inspired by broader geostrategic concerns and not by any abrupt burst of munificence. Escaping the hold of UN sanctions (imposed after the Lockerbie/UTA bombings) had become Tripoli's foremost foreign policy concern. Foreign Minister Umar al-Muntasir made it clear that Libya expected to be rewarded for its withdrawal (which was 'not in Libya's interests'), preferably by having the UN Security Council terminate sanctions.[152] Unfortunately for Tripoli, the Security Council was unmoved. The sanctions remained in place, and the Aouzou Strip remained in Chadian hands. Rather than accept defeat gracefully, Qaddafi gave a typically vitriolic speech in which he argued that France no longer had a justification for keeping forces in Chad.[153]

The Chad which Qaddafi eyed in 1994 could not, in any objective sense, be construed as significantly more or less threatening to Libya than the Chad of 1975, or 1980, or 1985. Yet at the last hour, Qaddafi accepted

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[151] "Tchad: le conflit tchado-libyen est <<définitivement terminé>>, selon le colonel Kadhafi," Le Monde, 7 March 1994.

[152] FBIS-NES-94-109, 7 June 1994, 24-25.

[153] SWB ME/2016 MED/19, 7 June 1994.

the end of his ambitions in Chad with stunning equanimity. This above all meant that the untold millions of dollars spent on the war effort had been squandered, that the thousands of lives lost had been wasted, that the victories won had been hollow and the defeats endured had been meaningless.

Conclusion

When it is remembered at all, Libya's war in Chad is usually recalled only by military historians. All too often, it is then reduced to an aside on desert warfare, leaving one with the vivid if simplistic image of nomadic warriors in Toyota pick-ups routing a sluggish, reluctant Libyan army.[154] This is a lamentable injustice to a story which is far more complex and infinitely more compelling: a tale of thwarted ambition, of multiple betrayals, of power and impotence, of best laid plans gone awry.

Lawrence Freedman has made the point that wars are most often fought when the outcome is in doubt.[155] So it was in Chad, where Qaddafi always thought he glimpsed victory through the fog of blood and smoke. There were, at least until 1987, good reasons for him to harbor optimism. In theory, the LAF's superior arsenal should have conferred an overwhelming advantage to Libyan units

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[154] s.v. "Chad" in R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Collins encyclopedia of military history, fourth edition, (London: BCA, 1993), 1538-1539.

[155] Freedman, 4.

when arrayed against the impoverished Chadians. Likewise, Qaddafi's tenacity gave him an advantage over the French, whose will to fight was questionable. Moreover, with Chad already fragmented by civil war there was rarely a shortage of clients willing to sign on with Tripoli. The confluence of these factors repeatedly placed victory within Libya's jaws . . . yet Tripoli always tasted defeat. Why?

The answer lay in Qaddafi's unerring ability to shoot himself in the foot. His efforts to conquer Chad in 1978 provoked French intervention and stalemate; Qaddafi's subsequent mishandling of his client led to a humiliating military defeat. His attempt to swallow up Chad through 'unification' in 1981 engendered a hailstorm of criticism and international support for his enemies; further unravelling of his partnership with Goukouni caused him to abruptly abandon Chad altogether. His 1983 offensive produced France's Operation Manta, which checked his ambitions. That he duped Mitterand into withdrawing in 1984 is true, but this was not as clever as it seemed since he merely lowered the threshold for French re-engagement. Predictably, his decision to renew hostilities in early 1986 led to France's Operation Epervier--again stopping the Libyan forces in their tracks. Finally, Qaddafi once more alienated Goukouni's FAP and thus precipitated a united anti-Libyan front which routed Libya's forces, pushed the LAF back into the Aouzou Strip, and destroyed a major military base in

Libya itself. While the immediate causes of any one of these setbacks were specific in time and place, their cumulative history revealed an unmistakable and by now familiar pattern of self-defeating behavior.

This counterproductive behavior originated firstly in a lack of accountability: so far as Qaddafi himself was concerned, the costs of his Chad policy were quite low during most of the war. Chad's debility was a veritable invitation to meddle. N'Djamena had no effectual means of retaliating against subversion, a fact made apparent when the Tombalbaye government was obliged to restore relations with Tripoli less than a year after fending off what it called a Libyan-backed putsch, and again when the Malloum government reluctantly reconciled with Tripoli after another Libyan sponsored coup attempt in April 1976.[156]

Qaddafi's counterproductive choices were also rooted in his world view. Though the leader of a Third World state, Qaddafi did not see himself as such, or conceive of Libya's security in terms befitting its stature. As John Wright notes, Libya's repeated incursions into Chad 'more closely resembled the obsessive behavior of a superpower than that of a developing country.'[157]

Such pretensions could not be indulged without cost to the nation state, even if its leader could dodge the personal political fallout. Should the financial costs

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[156] Neuberger, 32.

[157] Wright, 133.

of the war ever be tallied by some future historian they will no doubt be staggering. According to Wright, Libya spent as much as two million dollars per day on the war effort during the height of its fighting in Chad.[158] By conservative estimates the Jamahiriya lost at least $1 billion worth of military equipment in Chad during 1987 alone.[159] This was money that could have been poured into national development rather than being squandered on ephemeral notions of security.

The strategic costs were no less high. Libya's enemies used Chad to wage a proxy war against the regime in Tripoli, completing the 'southern front' which Qaddafi ostensibly sought to preclude.[160] Thousands of soldiers were killed or taken captive as a result. Libya itself was briefly invaded. The Aouzou Strip was forfeited. African states that had once viewed Tripoli with tolerance and sympathy now looked upon Libya with suspicion and hostility. As Nolutshungu writes, 'There can be little doubt that Tripoli's diplomacy undermined both its own aims and those of its Chadian allies.'[161] Truly, Qaddafi's war in Chad was cut from the cloth of Libyan national security policy.

At the beginning of this chapter we posed the

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[158] Africa Confidential, 21 September 1983.

[159] Anthony H. Cordesman, After the storm (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 134.

[160] SWB ME/6665/A/6-8, 5 March 1981.

[161] Nolutshungu, 313.

question, 'Is war rational?' Using the analytical framework employed throughout this study, we determined that those wars which manifestly fail to accomplish their objectives and instead accomplish quite the opposite should be deemed irrational. Libya's war in Chad was such a war, but it was neither the first nor (one fears) the last of its kind. In point of fact, Nasser too was guilty of leading his nation into a disastrous war. But Nasser at least had the wisdom not to needlessly cheapen his nation's suffering. This wisdom was lost on his would-be protege. On at least one occasion Qaddafi bitterly blamed his countrymen for dragging Libya into a pointless war.[162] This was cruel even as jest; beneath the cruelty, however, one detects a begrudging admission that the entire adventure had not only been futile but that Libya's losses had far outstripped its gains. As we shall see in the following chapter, Qaddafi (like the heads of most authoritarian states) was not oblivious to unpleasant reality--especially when his own survival was at stake.

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[162] "Libya: Looking for friends," Africa Confidential 28, no. 16 (5 August 1987): 5.

Chapter 6:

The Primacy of Internal Security

Theoretically, this is genuine democracy.
But realistically, the strong always rule . . .

-- *Muammar El Qaddafi,*
The Green Book[1]

The preceding chapters have been devoted to establishing the accuracy of this study's principal contention, that Libyan national security policy after 1969 was irrational, and that this irrationality was primarily attributable to the leadership of Muammar El Qaddafi. Having operationally defined irrationality as the consistent practice of counterproductive behavior, we saw that such a pattern could be detected in Libya's foreign affairs during the period in question. Reasoning from the premise that all humans have innate tendencies towards irrationality but that these tendencies are generally held in check by learned behavior, we addressed the subsidiary question, 'Why are leaders irrational?' We hypothesized that the answer is both systemic (because they can afford to be) and internal (because individuals may have value systems which predispose them to self-defeating behavior). Both of these factors were manifest in the formulation and implementation of the external

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[1] Muammar El Qaddafi, The green book (Tripoli: Public Establishment for Publishing, Advertising and Distribution, 1980), 40.

dimensions of Libyan national security policy.

This study would be incomplete if these propositions were not tested against Libya's internal security policies as well. In fact, internal security may well be the most important litmus test of this thesis since it constitutes the paramount security preoccupation of most Third World states. Much of the Third World security predicament can be seen as a conflict between the dictates of state-making and the demands of liberal political ideals.[2] The paths which most developing countries followed to statehood--an anti-colonialist struggle, a revolution or a coup--favored authoritarian leadership structures which easily evolved into dictatorships. As Barry Rubin notes, leaders who came to power by such means found it difficult 'to conceive of opponents as anything other than traitors.'[3]

Nevertheless, new states could not make policy in a vacuum; as the century progressed they were increasingly forced to contend with the spread of liberal ideals and concomitant expectations of political participation and human rights. Sham elections, the ubiquitous sop to such expectations, were nonetheless an admission that in an era marked by the slow spread of democracy, unrepresentative regimes were inherently insecure.

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[2] Mohammed Ayoob, The Third World security predicament, (London: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 15.

[3] Barry Rubin, Modern dictators: Third world coup makers, strongmen, and populist tyrants, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), 28-29.

Exploring the domestic dimension of the Third World security predicament obliges us to acknowledge one of the more intriguing theoretical debates in strategic studies: who or what is the appropriate object of internal security? The very phrase implicitly suggests the state has interests distinct from--and perhaps in conflict with--those of its citizens, and thus leads into an even more fundamental debate over the nature and rights of the state. To what extent the survival of the state should take precedence over the interests of its citizens is a perplexing question both in the abstract and in the day to day operation of the polity. The question becomes particularly poignant in the Third World, where control of the state often resides within a narrow social stratum--a particular religious or ethnic group, a given political party, or a traditional elite. In such cases use of the more limited concept of regime security may be appropriate, since it infers the divergence between societal security and the security of the ruling class.

Qaddafi tried to blur the disjunction between his own interests and those of ordinary Libyans by concocting banal syllogisms (e.g., the revolution is the people, hence all the people are revolutionaries, therefore there are no anti-revolutionaries in Libya) and by pretending that the Libyan state itself had ceased to exist, that it had truly become a 'state of the masses' where there was no need for representative government and where 'people's security' prevailed, thereby obviating the need for

police forces and even for the military. The reality of Qaddafi's brave new world was less utopian. Institutions of control not only survived the advent of the so-called 'non-state,' they flourished.[4] A state by any other name, it seemed, was still a state.

Thus, Qaddafi's Jamahiriya--no less than any other state--felt itself threatened by and in turn threatened and coerced its citizenry to ensure the regime's security. Shortly after coming to power, the Libyan leader spelled out his understanding of the imperatives of internal security in the Third World. Military regimes, he said, were liable to 'intrigues and liquidation.'[5] The problem was partly one of underdevelopment:

> I believe that they (coups) are inevitable at this stage since the newly-independent states suffer from chronic problems that many regimes fail to tackle . . . So long as these problems exist without solution . . . (the coups) will continue.[6]

But the question of internal security was also, he added, a matter of keeping the army, police and intelligence services in line. In this Qaddafi was largely successful, and if (per our hypothesis) consistent counterproductive behavior indicates irrationality, then consistent success augurs for rationality. We must

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[4] John Davis, Libyan Politics: Tribe and revolution (Berkeley, California: University of California Press): 217.

[5] In an interview with Bassam Freiha for Al-Anwar, 2 August 1974.

[6] In an interview with Dara Janikovic, 29 April 1974, for a Zagreb newspaper.

therefore take Qaddafi's political survival as evidence that his internal security policies were reasonably efficacious and rational.

Such a result not only accords with but is in fact anticipated by the proposition that irrationality is the luxury of those who are unaccountable, whereas rationality is essentially enforced by circumstance on those who must answer for their conduct. In the totalitarian state, those who aspire to power must be prepared to take it by force, as Qaddafi himself did in 1969. Thus, internal challengers of any stripe implicitly placed Qaddafi's very survival at stake, thereby imposing a degree of accountability on him rarely achieved by external actors. In other words, systemic conditions compelled Qaddafi to be rational. Those who invoke Qaddafi's survival as proof of his overall rationality ignore this dynamic which differentiated Libya's internal security policies from its external behavior.

If an essentially rational internal security policy can coexist with an irrational external security policy, how might the two correlate? External security policies obviously have internal consequences; so too domestic security arrangements have external ramifications. In the case of Libya we may posit that the primacy placed upon Qaddafi's survival acted as an irrationality coefficient, with deleterious effects on foreign and defence policy. There are sound theoretical grounds for

suspecting such a correlation. As Barry Buzan points out, domestic factors always impede the formation of rational national security policy. When they dominate decision making--as when the preservation of a regime becomes the state's prime security objective--they produce myopia, insensitivity, and inconsistency. In short, states in such a condition 'cannot be cool, calculating and rational actors in relation to the international dimension of the national security problem.'[7]

So it was with Qaddafi. His refusal to tolerate any political opposition tended to channel those disaffected with his rule into sedition and extremism. Preoccupation with his political survival blurred his judgement in foreign affairs, sparking a counterproductive terrorist campaign against Libyan exiles--the infamous 'mad dog' killings. Likewise, subjugating national security objectives such as the professionalization of the military to internal security priorities contributed to embarrassing military debacles. Thus, Libyan internal security policy--though rational in and of itself--was inextricably bound up with the overarching irrationality of the state's behavior.

In assessing the application and ramifications of such policies, it is helpful to make use of Buzan's typology of threats posed by the state to its citizenry:

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[7] Barry Buzan, People, States & Fear, second ed., (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 355-359.

first, threats incidental to law making and enforcement; second, threats resulting from direct state action against specific groups or individuals; third, threats arising from struggles for control of the state machinery; and fourth, threats engendered by the state's external security policies.[8] The first three facets of Buzan's typology serve as an organizational matrix for this chapter.

I. Disallowing dissent: The Libyan legal system as an instrument of internal security policy

All states protect themselves from their discontents by turning their legal apparatus against those who engage in sedition or revolt--offenses which, in totalitarian societies, are defined rather broadly. As recounted in Chapter 1, it did not take long for Qaddafi and his comrades in the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) to lay the legal foundation of a police state.[9] An RCC decree of December 11, 1969, prohibited anti-revolutionary activity in the broadest of terms ('inciting propaganda against the revolutionary republican system . . . stirring hatred and disunity . . . spreading rumors . . . demonstrating or striking') and made such offenses punishable by three to fifteen years imprisonment. This was merely the beginning of

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[8] Buzan, 44.

[9] The best analysis of which is found in Amnesty International's report, "Libya: Amnesty International's prisoner concerns in the light of recent legal reforms," June 1991.

what soon became an intimidating body of law. Law 71 of 1972 defined all political party activity as treasonous and made its practice punishable by death. In 1975 the authorities amended the penal code to make the dissemination of ideas critical of the existing social and political structure (i.e., democracy) punishable by death. A May 1979 law on economic crimes promised life imprisonment or death for those 'guilty of sabotage in oil establishments or subsidiaries or any public establishment, or warehouse of raw materials, products or consumer goods.'[10]

That such laws could be promulgated without generating the slightest degree of protest was indicative of the arrested development of Libyan civil society when Qaddafi came to power. Neither tradition nor the experience of decolonization had prepared Libyans to expect anything other than a police state. The average Libyan had precious little experience with representative government. His cultural and political frontiers were largely limited to the Arab world, where totalitarian rule was still *de riguer* and human rights were given short shrift. His memories were of the Italian occupation--a less than sterling introduction to Western political values--and of the Sanusi monarchy, which was certainly no bastion of civil liberty either.[11] The

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[10] SWB ME/6106/A/6, 2 May 1979.

[11] For example, a protest against shady election returns in early 1952 was quelled by Tripoli's police; twelve people died and many were injured. The U.S. Ambassador, Henry Villard,

elite few who had been exposed to liberal democracy were scions of the monarchy, and stood to gain the most from keeping such values at bay.

As a result, Libyans disputed neither their new laws nor their arbitrary enforcement. Nor did they protest when even the few rights accorded to them by law were soon suspended in practice. The needs of the revolution simply came first, and determining those needs was the prerogative of Qaddafi's band. As the Libyan leader himself explained:

> He (a government official) is in charge of everything and nobody can say no to him. Anyone who said no would be seen as collaborating with the enemy. He (the official) has the right to shoot him dead, often without a trial or with a summary trial lasting no more than a few minutes. The revolution would be doomed without this.[12]

The climate took on a pall of fear and suspicion. Citizens were encouraged to inform on neighbors and relatives so that the 'people's justice' could be meted out:

> Every street should have a people's court. And everyone who notices corruption should report it to the court, whose address should be given and declared. You see so and so behaved corruptly, you immediately report him . . . This way we can end corruption, each one reports on the other in order to rid the country of this corruption.[13]

According to Qaddafi's political theories, people thus

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expressed approval of the King's ability to maintain domestic order. John Wright, Libya: A modern history, (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 77-78.

[12] SWB ME/2632 MED/299, 7 June 1996.

[13] SWB ME/0709/A/2, 10 March 1990.

empowered to police themselves did not need the state to administer justice, maintain order, or defend against internal threats. The police were duly renamed the 'Police at the Service of the People and the Revolution' and later the 'People's Security Force.'[14]

Libyans viewed such verbal shellgames with incredulity. For a state that was supposedly not a state at all, theirs was awash with institutions of control. Some were political, such as the People's Congresses and People's Committees. Many more were of a police or paramilitary nature; the regime supported a baffling and intentionally redundant array of intelligence and security services. These included Military Intelligence, the Jamahiriya Security Organization (which dealt with foreign intelligence and covert operations), the Revolutionary Committees (which also collected foreign and domestic intelligence and conducted its own covert operations), the Jamahiri (aka Republican) Guards (whose job it was to keep the Libyan Armed Forces [LAF] in line), and a Deterrence Brigade (possibly composed of Jamahiri Guardsmen, the brigade was tasked with smashing any coup attempt). Last but not least came Qaddafi's hand-picked corps of female bodyguards--an idiosyncratic solution to the problem of personal security that, whatever its utility, was a perennial source of amusement

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[14] Jean Tartter, "National security," in Libya: A country study, ed. Helen Metz, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989), 285.

for visiting diplomats and journalists.[15]

This plethora of services was just the tip of the iceberg. Early in his rule Qaddafi gave each of the country's regional governates a security directorate with responsibility for the police and militia forces as well as the civil defence volunteers in the area.[16] This division of labor survived with few changes into the 1990s. The governors of each of the five internal security directorates (*kata'ib*)--Tripoli, Sirte, Ajdabiya, Tobruk, and Sebha--reported directly to Qaddafi. Each commanded a detachment of 200 to 400 agents with which to eradicate any sign of rebellion.[17]

In addition, the Ministries (later the People's Committees) of the Interior and Justice, the LAF, the People's Militia, and the secret police were all tasked with internal security duties, and their jurisdictions inevitably overlapped.

Since the time of the Mamelukes--the slave-warriors recruited to defend an Arab dynasty who ended up usurping power in the thirteenth century--astute Arab rulers had kept a watchful eye on their praetorian guards. Qaddafi

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[15] "Libya: The limits of tolerance," Africa Confidential 27, no. 19 (17 September 1986): 8; see also Jane Kokan, "In love with Gaddafi," BBC focus on Africa 6, no. 3 (July-September 1995): 4-8.

[16] The revolution of 1st September: The fourth anniversary (Benghazi: Libyan Arab Republic Ministry of Information and Culture, 1973), 114-116.

[17] Moncef Djaziri, "Libye: Chronique Intérieure," in Annuaire de L'afrique du nord 1992, vol. 31, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1992), 760.

was therefore quick to realize that his security forces, by acquiring the strength to ensure that no other institution could threaten him, necessarily became threats themselves.[18] Neither this problem nor its solution was exclusive to the Arab world. Historian John Keegan, in describing the competition between the German army and the SS observes that Hitler 'impelled by the logic of the dictatorship principle--*Führerprinzip*--was hellbent on enlarging and compounding the divisions implicit in his own system.'[19] Compelled by the same logic, Qaddafi employed the same strategy of pitting his defenders against one another and paring back those that accrued too much power unto themselves.

Thus, Libyan internal security was a zero-sum game in which any increase in the regime's security was offset by a corresponding rise in the unpredictability and insecurity of the society as a whole. Like China during the cultural revolution which Qaddafi sought to replicate, Libya became a bewildering and chaotic place. In dealing with the state, the ordinary Libyan faced a morass of officials with concentric areas of jurisdiction and fuzzy limits to authority. Determining when a policeman or local politician was exceeding his authority

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[18] For example, an elite unite in Benghazi reportedly attempted to mount a coup d'etat in late July 1975. "Paper in Cairo reports a coup in Libya foiled," New York Times, 5 August 1975.

[19] John Keegan, The mask of command, (New York: Viking, 1987), 273.

became an almost Sisyphean task.[20] Moreover, the astute citizen was beset by the unsettling thought that distinguishing one's self as a zealous supporter of the regime might have the dangerous effect of attracting attention in the next round of purges.

As with any large organization, widespread redundancies produced inefficiencies. After a serious coup d'etat attempt almost succeeded in October 1975, Qaddafi tried to restore order by placing the security services under one roof, which he dubbed the Office for the Security of the Revolution.[21] But the existing bureaucracies proved too strong, and the new, under-empowered office slipped into oblivion. It took years for Qaddafi to again admit that too many bodies had been given emergency policing powers. Angered by bureaucratic turf wars, he declared in 1989:

> The Jamahiriyah security apparatus must also be abolished because complaints are mounting against it and its violations are on the increase, added to the competition it is engaging in with the Foreign (Ministry). The Jamahiriyah security apparatus must be abolished. It duplicates security work with the (Bureau of) Investigations . . .[22]

Still the duplications of effort persisted. Agents of military intelligence, the military police, the Bureau of

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[20] For a graphic illustration, see Davis, 138-140, 221.

[21] Wright, 187. For similar reasons, Qaddafi was compelled to create an 'Office of External Security' in the early 1980s as well. Andrew Rathmell, "Libya's intelligence and security services," International Defense Review 24, no. 7 (1991): 696.

[22] SWB ME/0361/A/2, 18 January 1989.

Investigation, and the Revolutionary Committees were all authorized to arrest, interrogate, and issue verdicts.[23]

In addition to deterring insurrection, the Libyan regime hoped that its security services would inspire citizens to actively support the government's initiatives. But, like people everywhere, Libyans were generally more concerned with their own prosperity and comfort than with reordering society. The People's Congresses and Committees--the chief adornments of Qaddafi's Third Universal Theory, which purported to remedy the ills of representative democracy--were unable to overcome the widespread political apathy that greeted each new chapter in Qaddafi's revolution. If anything, they were instead having a centrifugal effect as committees, congresses and even local police forces became aligned with regional or tribal interests.[24]

What was needed, Qaddafi thought, was a new corps of political shock troops. In May 1976 he unveiled his solution, the Revolutionary Committees. The Committees' task was to galvanize--and supervise--the lackadaisical People's Congresses and Committees. Revolutionary Committees soon coalesced in every major city and in most organizations. 'Committees everywhere' became the surreal battle cry of Libyan politics. In March 1979 the now omnipresent Revolutionary Committees were given veto power over the membership of the People's Congresses and

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[23] Amnesty International, June 1991, 1.

[24] Davis, 142-44, 223-24.

Committees.[25] Scarcely a year later, in February 1980, they supplanted the regular judiciary as well. Qaddafi authorized the Revolutionary Committees to hold *ad hoc* courts and to dispense revolutionary (i.e., cursory) justice.[26] Human rights advocates drily noted that cases tried in this manner fell short of international standards for fair trial.[27]

In fact, the Revolutionary Committees were responsible for many of the worst abuses of the Qaddafi era. They allegedly maintained a torture center in Tripoli (rivalled by a similar center in the basement of the Military Intelligence Headquarters).[28] And it was they who carried out the Colonel's order of February 6, 1980, to 'liquidate' expatriate Libyans who refused to come home (although the Colonel later stressed that this responsibility could not be 'restricted to the revolutionary committees alone . . . every Libyan who travels abroad . . . is then responsible for the elimination of its [Libya's] enemies').[29] Fifteen Libyan expatriates--'stray dogs' in Qaddafi's parlance--were murdered that year alone. Several of the attacks were

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[25] Hanspeter Mattes, "The rise and fall of the Revolutionary Committees," Qadhafi's Libya: 1969 to 1994, ed. Dirk Vandewalle, (London: Macmillan, 1995), 100.

[26] Mattes, 101.

[27] Amnesty International, June 1991, 6.

[28] Amnesty International, "Violations of human rights in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya," 20 November 1984, 9.

[29] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 2.

intentionally gruesome. In Athens, the killers of two Libyan students painted revolutionary slogans on the wall in the victim's blood. In England, the young children of another dissident were sickened after eating poisoned peanuts left by a would-be assassin. Astoundingly, the Libyan government acknowledged that such attacks were a matter of policy. In a letter to Amnesty International, one Libyan foreign ministry official proudly wrote: 'many countries liquidate their political enemies secretly, only the Jamahiriya publicly announces this policy.'[30]

The 'stray dogs' campaign was essentially an overreaction to the emergence of expatriate opposition groups, groups which--notwithstanding their sponsorship by Western intelligence agencies--posed scant threat to the Libyan regime. Yet the campaign had a deeper significance insomuch as it reflected Qaddafi's aspirations to Great Power status. By demonstrating that he could assassinate exiles in almost any industrialized country--Britain, Germany, Italy, and the United States--Qaddafi was giving the world notice that he was not to be trifled with, and would not be constrained by international norms. Qaddafi was a law unto himself.[31]

Of course, Libya was unable to sustain such behavior with impunity and therefore chose to end the campaign in mid-

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[30] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 2.

[31] As Qaddafi put it, 'Revolutionary law and revolutionary doctrine do not recognize international institutions. They only recognize the language of revolution.' "Qaddafi commemorates coup," New York Times, 2 September 1985.

1980 (although it was briefly resumed in 1985). The assassinations nevertheless provided a striking example of how internal security objectives propelled the ship of state into counterproductive waters.

The Revolutionary Committees penetrated the military and police forces in 1979. They were not welcomed by the officers corp, who viewed committee apparatchiks with the universal loathing of professional soldiers for political minders. But there were no open displays of contempt. Committee members had more authority then the officers they worked alongside of, ranks notwithstanding.[32] The committees, eager to exhibit their revolutionary zeal, denounced the officers as bourgeois fascists--which was not so far-fetched as it sounded at first. Many soldiers moonlighted at other jobs, and according to one Libyan shopkeeper, 'A military dinar is worth two civilian dinars.'[33] In 1983 the Committees' newspaper, *Al Zahf Al Akhdar*, launched a blistering series of attacks on the officer corps. (Ironically, many Committee members enjoyed even greater perks than did military officers).[34]

By mid-decade the Revolutionary Committees had sprouted a paramilitary wing, the Revolutionary Guards

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[32] Omar El Fathaly and Monte Palmer, "The transformation of mass political institutions in revolutionary Libya: Structural solutions to a behavioral problem," Social and economic development in Libya, ed. George Joffé and Keith McLachlan, (Wisbech: MENAS Press, 1982), 259.

[33] Davis, 221.

[34] Judith Miller, God has ninety-nine names, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996): 226-227.

(also known as the Republican or Jamahiri Guards). Comprised of some 1000 to 2000 members of the Qaddadfa tribe, the Guards were armed with weapons ranging from tanks and armored personnel carriers to anti-aircraft missiles. The duplication of effort was again intentional, and marked the second time Qaddafi had tried to break the LAF's monopoly of armed force; in 1973 he launched a gendarmerie known as the People's Militia. The poorly equipped and virtually untrained militia, however, was scorned by the LAF. The Revolutionary Guards proved more formidable. They were entrusted with ferreting out threats to the regime, and allegedly arrested thousands in the aftermath of a May 1985 coup attempt. Moreover, they were reportedly made the custodians of ammunition at major military bases.[35] This arrangement may have broken down after the 1986 bombings, when some anti-aircraft crews were reportedly unable to load their weapons because the ammunition was locked up.

Indeed, 1985 was probably the high-water mark for the Revolutionary Committees as a whole.[36] The following year the LAF muscled their minders into the background, apparently taking advantage of mistakes Revolutionary Guard units made during the U.S. attacks. Moreover, the adventurism of the Revolutionary Committees (i.e., the assassination of Libyan dissidents) had been instrumental in derailing relations with Washington even before the

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[35] Tartter, 257.

[36] Mattes, 107.

bombings. Thus, even Mattes, not a scholar to exaggerate Libya's faults, concedes that 'by the end of the decade (the actions of the Revolutionary Committees) had become counterproductive to the pursuit of revolution.'[37] Qaddafi himself acknowledged that the Revolutionary Committees had grown a little too zealous in 'liquidating' dissidents--and even some of their own members--for deviating 'either in behaviour or in conviction.'[38] Although Qaddafi had sanctioned and directed these ultimately counterproductive activities, blame could only safely be apportioned to the Committees.

Within two years the Revolutionary Committees evolved from brownshirts to scapegoats, becoming the foremost target of a series of domestic reforms Qaddafi unleashed in early 1988. He abolished the extraordinary courts, thereby depriving the Committees of their most powerful weapon, and created a Secretariat of Jamahiri Mobilization and Revolutionary Guidance to bring the Revolutionary Committees to heel.

Qaddafi instituted a number of additional reforms to prevent such abuses from recurring, but this liberalization proved fleeting. After repeatedly urging that the death penalty be abolished, Qaddafi thought better of relinquishing--even if only in theory--his ultimate coercive tool:

> There is no surgery without blood . . . serious

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[37] ibid., 106.

[38] SWB ME/0245/A/4, 1 September 1988.

> transformations (of society) . . . can only be achieved through a huge number of victims and blood.[39]

Accordingly, he rescinded the prohibition on the Permanent Revolutionary Court in October 1989, re-sanctioning the application of 'revolutionary' justice. He did, however, subject the Revolutionary Committees to tighter control. In January 1990 Qaddafi invited his quasi-parliament, the General People's Congress, to refashion the police system according to their liking.[40] In March he ordered 'all the revolutionaries' to withdraw from the People's Committees and the Secretariats of the People's Congresses, thereby stripping them of the immense political power they had hitherto enjoyed.[41]

In practice, the security infrastructure Qaddafi created--composed of a stifling legal code and a coven of mutually suspicious institutions with which to enforce it--was quite effective. Yet its design was not flawless. The system's chief defect was that it propelled many dissatisfied Libyans into extremism since all other forms of political protest were closed to them. Many of Qaddafi's internal threats were thus of his own making.

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[39] Amnesty International, "Libya: Prisoners released; Abolition of the death penalty proposed," March 1988.

[40] SWB ME/0668/A/3, 22 January 1990.

[41] SWB ME/0709 A/1, 10 March 1990.

II. Persecuting the protestors: Targeted repression as an instrument of internal security policy

Though all Libyans had to contend with an atmosphere of repression, those unlucky enough to be identified as members of potentially threatening elements were subjected to deliberate persecution. Pre-emptively identifying these potential political enemies was one of the major responsibilities of the Libyan security services. Once so identified, Qaddafi's foes led a precarious existence. The dreaded summons to police headquarters for questioning carried with it the threat of imprisonment and perhaps torture.[42] At worst, guests of the penal system were liable to suffer one of the fatal 'accidents' endemic to police states. Amr Taher Deghayes, co-founder of the Libyan Baath party, so died immediately after his arrest in February 1980.[43]

Universities, with their unique mixture of intellectual energy and political fervor, were natural hunting grounds for the regime's informers. Well before coming to power Qaddafi became aware of (and sought to capitalize on) the universities' potential for breeding political agitation. In 1964 the Cyrenaican Defense Force, under the command of Mahmud Bukuwaytin, killed a number of Libyan students while suppressing a riot in

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[42] The arbitrary arrest and torture of civilians was at times Kafkaesque. See, for example, the cases recounted in D. Blundy and Andrew Lycett, Qaddafi and the Libyan revolution, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 115-116.

[43] Wright, 277.

Benghazi. The Premier, rather than Bukuwaytin, was forced to resign to appease the angered public; Bukuwaytin was deemed too valuable to the King's security.[44]

The Qaddafi regime was no less brutal in quelling student protest. After demonstrations erupted at Benghazi University in April 1982, three students allegedly died while being tortured. The following year Qaddafi instructed the Revolutionary Committees to purge the campuses, an order which touched off a string of violent demonstrations resulting in as many as twenty-five deaths.[45] Determined to restore order and to make an example of the protestors, the authorities hung one of the student leaders on the campus of Al Fateh University on April 7, 1983. Two other Al Fateh students were executed in the same fashion the following year.[46] After a five year interlude of uneasy calm, clashes between students and security services again erupted at Al Fateh University (January 9, 1989) and Gar Yunis University (April 1989).[47]

Students were fairly easy to keep in line since they wielded little social and economic power. The same could not be said of Libya's tribes. In the first years of his

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[44] Wright, 98.

[45] Mary-Jane Deeb, Libya's foreign policy in North Africa, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 147.

[46] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 11-12.

[47] Amnesty International, "Libya: Further information on political detention," October 1992, 3.

rule Qaddafi, it will be recalled, tried to eradicate the tribal bonds which defined traditional Libyan society. This dissolution was imperative if the state were to assert its authority. Tribal loyalties conflicted with the absolute loyalty demanded by the state, and tribal leaders resisted the modernizing agenda of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Yet the RCC underestimated the resilience of the tribal system and was soon compelled to abandon their frontal assault on tribalism.

Notwithstanding this failure, Qaddafi still considered tribalism an anachronism. He periodically berated his countrymen for perpetuating a tradition that nurtured corruption and nepotism, and considered tribal loyalties particularly egregious when they intruded upon the workings of state security:

> A policeman should not stay near his family or cousin. This is one of the causes of corruption, putting down roots: this is his cousin, this is his tribe, this man he cannot arrest, he cannot search, he cannot report.[48]

In reality, corruption was probably the least of Tripoli's concerns. The real fear was that mid-level and senior police officials would acquire a local following which would allow them to mount a coup; to prevent this, officers were subjected to frequent transfers. But the problem of tribal nepotism was real enough, and was compounded by tribal rivalries; it was not uncommon, for example, for a policemen to have his objectivity and even

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[48] SWB ME/0709/A/2, 10 March 1990.

authority challenged by members of other tribes.[49] In 1979 the regime actually erased its regional administrative boundaries in an attempt to abrogate traditional tribal borders, a perpetual obstacle to national integration.[50] Years later Qaddafi showed he had not abandoned the hope of outlawing tribes altogether: 'One thing is illegal though, it is tribal blocs. . . You could not bring any benefit to your tribe. Those times are gone.'[51]

However, Qaddafi's socio-political tinkering inadvertently strengthened the very bonds he hoped to disintegrate. The evisceration of state institutions, which The Green Book forecast would produce a utopian political order, instead had the reverse effect of amplifying anxiety and insecurity. The erratic performance of the People's Congresses, Committees, and what remained of normal bureaucratic institutions, created civic stresses which were only relieved through the re-emergence of tribalism, making the tribes 'a political identity and affiliation of last resort.'[52]

None of this was lost on Qaddafi, who by 1975 had

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[49] Davis, 218-219.

[50] George Joffé, "Libya--regional history, regional and national borders," in Libya: State and region, ed. J. Allan, K. McLachlan and M. Buru, (London: SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, 1989), 13.

[51] SWB ME/0668/A/6, 22 January 1990.

[52] Lisa Anderson, "Qadhafi's legacy: An evaluation of a political experiment," in Qadhafi's Libya: 1969 to 1994, ed. Dirk Vandewalle, (London: Macmillan, 1995), 230.

marginalized the surviving members of the RCC (in fact, he abolished the RCC as such) but in so doing had narrowed his power base. The Colonel was thus obliged to reconsider the utility of the kinship ties he had hitherto scorned. Rather than suppressing tribal affiliations for the sake of unity, Qaddafi gradually began to exploit them. He rewarded cooperative tribal leaders with political appointments and entrenched members of his own tribe in favored jobs, most especially in the security services. Tribalism crept into the most intimate areas of Qaddafi's inner life. His first marriage was an arranged union with the daughter of a senior army official under the monarchy. The marriage did not long endure, doubtless in part because Qaddafi had his wife's uncle (another supporter of the monarchy) imprisoned; his wife subsequently humiliated the Libyan leader by beseeching Nasser to intervene on her uncle's behalf.[53] His second marriage was, intentionally or not, a sound political match of which any Bedouin sheikh would have been proud.[54]

In particular, Qaddafi favored his own tribe, the Qaddadfa, with senior military and police posts and a disproportionate share of the state's development spending. The result was a sociological upheaval which

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[53] Jehan Sadat, A woman of Egypt, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 243-44.

[54] Qaddafi once tried, unsuccessfully, to heal relations with Egypt by proposing a marriage between one of his cousins and Sadat's daughter. He later proposed a similar union to Bourguiba (again, without success). Sadat, 337-38.

catapulted the hitherto disadvantaged Qaddadfa tribe and its allies (such as the Warfalla) from the bottom of Libyan society to its highest echelons. Qaddafi's conversion from anti-tribalism was not unusual in the post-colonial Arab world. Other rulers (including King Idris) had reached a similar accommodation with tradition and tribal loyalty.[55] Thus, once the sound and the fury of the Libyan 'revolution' had dissipated, the new order looked suspiciously akin to the old.

Among the elements of tribal tradition that Qaddafi turned to his own advantage was the idea of tribal justice, the central premise of which is that tribes are accountable for the behavior of their members. From this premise flowed collective rewards (the nepotism that Qaddafi decried but adroitly practiced) and collective punishments (which he practiced without complaint). Collective punishment was essentially a form of deterrence. Tripoli hoped that the likelihood that a family, clan, or tribe would suffer for any conspiracy against the regime would deter any would-be attackers (the same logic can be detected behind Israel's policy of dynamiting the homes of Palestinian suicide bombers).

The Libyan regime was therefore quick to punish tribes for the misdeeds of their members, even when it was questionable whether an individual acted with the foreknowledge or support of his tribe.

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[55] Charles Tripp, "Near East," in Superpower competition and security in the Third World, ed. Robert S. Litwak and Samuel F. Wells Jr., (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1988), 113.

Woe to the tribe living in the aftermath of an unsuccessful assassination attempt by one of its members. Jobs were lost, careers ended, fathers and brothers carted off for questioning and perhaps imprisonment. The only consolation in such circumstances was that, given the abundance of attempts on Qaddafi's life, nearly every tribe in Libya had been there before. The Shuhaybat were chastened after one of their own launched a minor rebellion in 1980.[56] In May 1981 the Megarha fell under a cloud after tribe members serving in the armed forces were discovered with a cache of weapons in the desert.[57]

In October 1993 it was the turn of the Warfalla, hitherto considered one of the most loyal tribes. Yet several hundred members conspired to launch a rebellion from their stronghold of Bani Walid, from whence the uprising was to spread to other cells in Misrata, Gharian, Tarhuna, and Brak.[58] Alas, the hapless Warfalla were betrayed. Security forces crushed the conspirators in a pre-emptive attack on October 11, three days before the coup was to have occurred. LAF pilots flew sorties against the conspirators from bases near Chad (suggesting both that Libyan intelligence knew exactly where the plotters were, and that there were plenty of them) and

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[56] e.g., SWB ME/6502/A/10, 20 August 1980.

[57] Andrew Lycett, "Libya: Is the sun setting on Muammar Gadaffi's day?," New African (October 1982): 18.

[58] David Hirst, "Gadafy puts down rebellion led by army," Guardian, 25 October 1993; Mark Nicholson, "Rebellion crushed by Gadaffi, diplomats say," Financial Times, 23-24 October 1993.

bombed local arms depots for good measure.[59] Qaddafi's Revolutionary Guard proved their worth by leading the ground assault and mopping up operations, though the commander of the celebrated 'Deterrence Battalion' was alleged to be among the conspirators.[60] Anxious to avoid the appearance of weakness, Qaddafi took the BBC to task for reporting the coup attempt.[61]

Numbed, the Warfallah began a prolonged and very public penitence. Within a few days the sheikh of the Bani Walid and representatives of related clans appeared on Libyan television pledging their fealty to Colonel Qaddafi.[62] Nevertheless, the Warfalla remained the target of official harassment for the next twelve months, a campaign which culminated in mid-1994 with the arrest of 55 Warfalla officers accused of spying for the United States.[63] Alleged confessions from the accused were aired on Libyan television. Not until September of the following year did the Warfalla finally get a hint of reprieve, when Qaddafi lauded Bani Walid for setting an example 'which ought to be followed--to condemn treason,

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[59] George Joffé, "Qadhafi survives the coup," Middle East International, no. 462 (5 November 1993): 8.

[60] The Reuter Library Report, 31 October 1993.

[61] Qaddafi was particularly angered by the BBC's coverage of the explosion of a police explosives dump, explosives he said were 'used for decorations' (FBIS-NES-95-218, 13 November 1995).

[62] Charles Richards, "Mass arrests as Gaddafi 'crushes army rebellion,'" Independent, 23 October 1993.

[63] "Libya's restive tribes," Foreign Report, no. 2316 (18 August 1994): 3-4; FBIS-NES-94-120, 22 June 1994.

then to encircle treason and to finally destroy the nest of treason. Treason at Bani Walid is totally rejected and is being trampled underfoot.'[64]

Naturally, Qaddafi's own tribesmen, the Qaddadfa, were considered the most loyal of all, since they owed their elevated status--and quite possibly their ability to retain it--to Qaddafi's survival. But even the Qaddadfa were not above suspicion. The November 1985 murder of Hassan Ishkal, a prominent Qaddadfa, created a surge of tribal resentment against Qaddafi, and even produced a temporary refusal to send young men to fight in Chad. The state-controlled press struck back with excoriating attacks on the Qaddadfa.[65] According to Libyan opposition sources, a Qaddadfa member and two associates attempted to assassinate Qaddafi at a celebration on 28 April, 1990.[66] (If press accounts are to be believed, the Qaddadfa were also instrumental in another failed assassination attempt against Qaddafi in September 1996.[67])

Though no tribe--not even his own--could be completely trusted, Qaddafi managed to hold them all in

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[64] SWB ME/2405/MED/26, 11 September 1995.

[65] "Libya: A lonely Colonel," Africa Confidential 27, no. 1, 1-2.

[66] "Regime clamps down on internal dissent," NESL Newsreport 7, no. 4, (July-August 1990): 19.

[67] See "Exiled ex-royal claims Qadhafi has survived assassination plot," Mideast Mirror, 17 September 1996, 22; for details of another alleged assassination attempt see "Attempt on Qadhafi's life dismissed as 'groundless,'" Mideast Mirror, 12 December 1996, 11.

check by playing an elaborate game of political chess: fueling a rivalry here, humbling a powerful clan there, always pitting the tribes against each other. However, beneath the patina of tribalism lay one more layer of Libyan identity that competed with Qaddafi's state for the loyalty of the man on the street--faith.

No single group of Libyans suffered more at the hands of the state than did the Islamists (i.e., members of the Muslim Brotherhood and others who took their political agenda from Islam and advocated the imposition of *sharia*--Islamic law). That they should ultimately become the principal target of the regime's security services was no small irony--for much of his career Qaddafi himself was regarded by Westerners as the archetypical Islamic fundamentalist, an image he purposely cultivated. Qaddafi's professions of piety were frequent and ostentatious. Libyans were bombarded by images of him visiting mosques, praying in the desert, and reading the Quran. These displays of religiosity implied that Qaddafi's political legitimacy flowed from his devotion to Islam rather than from his self-styled 'revolution.' Thus, in some respects the Islamist challenge was a threat of his own making.

As early as 1974, a prescient observer noted that Qaddafi's 'ideological compound of nationalism, religion, and social reform serves to clear the way for the (Muslim) Brotherhood's message, rather like John the

Baptist did for Christ.'[68] In many respects their messages were identical. Both nurtured a sense of historical injustice and espoused a mystical rebirth of the Arab/Islamic world, through faithfulness to Arab nationalism or God, respectively.

Yet in the late 20th century, Islamic fundamentalists had a significant advantage over the Arab nationalists: Arab nationalism had been tried and discredited, whereas fundamentalism remained relatively untested. Having lost out in the initial rush to post-colonialism power, the Islamists watched patiently from the sidelines as Arab nationalism failed to prevent the creation of the State of Israel, led to humiliating military defeats in 1956 and 1967, and failed to close the power gap (as measured in prosperity and military strength) between the Arabs and the West. Under such circumstances it was easy for the Islamists to recirculate the old nationalist rhetoric and, by giving their message a religious twist, appear to have fresh and credible ideas.

Nowhere was the rise and fall of Arab nationalism more apparent than in Libya. For the first decade of his career, Qaddafi rode buoyantly on a sea of rising oil revenues. Then the oil market crashed, the Americans stopped rolling over, the war in Chad turned sour, the Security Council imposed sanctions and suddenly the self-

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[68] Ruth First, Libya: The elusive revolution, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), 255.

styled 'Guide' seemed to have lost his way. Qaddafi's speeches became shriller, his face bloated by worry (and, some said, drugs), his optimism ever more forced. Seeing him falter, Libya's Islamists began to take aim at Qaddafi's regime.

Qaddafi had long ago recognized the danger of being attacked in the name of Islam, and systematically tried to neutralize those most likely to use Islam as a weapon against him. For example, in 1973 he launched a 'cultural revolution' which, though it also targeted Baathists and Marxists, was primarily a crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Liberation Movement. Religious leaders were subjected to media attacks. The Grand Mufti of Libya, Sheikh Tahir al-Zawi, was forced to resign in 1977 and was not replaced.

In early 1978 the regime went further, instructing the people's committees to take control of mosques with 'paganist tendencies' and 'heretical imams.'[69] This was followed in 1980 with a blunt warning to Muslim clerics to steer clear of politics.[70] Those who ignored this warning did so at considerable peril: during that year Sheikh Al-Bishti, a popular theologian in Tripoli, was quietly kidnapped and executed along with four of his followers.[71] Although Al-Bishti did not pertain to any

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[69] Lillian Craig Harris, Libya: Qadhafi's revolution and the modern state, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 49.

[70] "Qadhafi draws the line between politics and Islam," Jamahiriya Review, no. 3 (August 1980): 6.

[71] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 11.

specific Islamist group, he had criticized the regime in his sermons.[72] The security services prevented any public protest over his demise.[73]

As the decade progressed, the suppression of Islamists became more brutal. In June 1984 eight members of the Muslim Brotherhood, described by JANA as 'agents of America,' were hung.[74] Nine more activists were publicly executed in February 1987, and a further twenty-one were secretly killed during Ramadan in May 1989.[75]

This increased brutality reflected the Islamist movement's gathering steam. To an extent, geography and culture made the growth of a Libyan Islamist movement inevitable: burgeoning (and often militant) Islamist movements in neighboring Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, and Algeria diffused propaganda, acolytes, and weapons into Libya.

The year 1989 was a watershed for Libyan Islamists, a year which saw them grow from mere nuisance to credible threat. This maturation was marked by a series of violent incidents, including a demonstration by religious students at al-Fatih University in Tripoli, a riot at a soccer game, an armed skirmish between militant Islamists

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[72] George Joffé, "The role of Islam," in The green and the black, ed. René Lemarchand, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 44.

[73] George Joffé, "Islamic opposition in Libya," Third World quarterly 10, (April 1988): 625-26.

[74] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 4.

[75] "Libya: Gaddafi's fundamental problem," Africa Confidential, 30, no. 13 (23 June 1989): 6-7.

and security personnel near the road to the Benghazi airport, and a conflict between Revolutionary Committee members and students at Gar Yunis University.[76] The most serious of these incidents was the airport road incident, which occurred on January 14, 1989. Members of the fundamentalist sect al-Jihad built an entrenchment alongside the road from whence they began shooting at passing motorists. The fundamentalists killed the first detachment of policemen who responded to the scene, and did not surrender until they were surrounded by a larger force.[77] Visibly shaken by this Algerian-style violence, the regime arrested some 392 known or suspected Islamists over the course of the next fifteen months.[78]

A few weeks later Qaddafi devoted a lengthy address to the Islamist threat and employed all his rhetorical skills to discredit the fundamentalists. If Islamists ever managed to gain power, he said, they would trample on Libyans' civil liberties. There would be no appeal: 'If a ruler is appointed in the name of religion (or in the name of revolution, one might add), this will be a

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[76] When authorities cancelled a scheduled match with Algeria, 70,000 angry fans turned their wrath on the security officers present (SWB ME/0365i, 23 January 1989). Among other slogans, the fans chanted 'Qaddafi is the enemy of God.' Soldiers from the Deterrence Brigade were called out and quelled the demonstration by firing into the crowd; at least three people were reportedly killed. "Libya: The fundamentalists' rise," Africa Confidential 30, no. 3 (3 February 1989): 7; Amnesty International, "Arrest of possible prisoners of conscience," August 1989.

[77] Amnesty International, June 1991, 16-17.

[78] Amnesty International, June 1991, 16-17.

great disaster, because if he follows the wrong path nobody can tell him that he is not following the right path . . . your lives would become hell.[79] Moreover, he warned that Islamist rule would be particularly repressive for women; those who ventured out of the home would be killed as infidels, and those who did not would be regarded as chattel.[80]

He embellished these themes over the next few months, describing Islamists as a Mafia 'destroying Islam from within.'[81] Fundamentalism was not, he said, an indigenous movement but a carcinogenic import. Foreign workers, particularly South Asians who had come to work as teachers, were responsible for indoctrinating Libyan youth with alien ideals, ideals that the Colonel claimed were 'more dangerous than Zionism . . . AIDS or cancer or TB.'[82]

In branding Islamist leaders as foreigners the Colonel was making a transparent appeal to Arab prejudices: 'Are we now going to listen to a non-Arab telling us about our religion?'[83] Certainly not, said Qaddafi. Islamists, he claimed, were seriously deluded: 'Whoever opposes Libya is someone who fights for Satan

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[79] SWB ME/0405 A/4, 10 March 1989; parentheses added.

[80] SWB ME/0787/A/1, 11 June 1990.

[81] SWB ME/0787/A/1, 11 June 1990.

[82] SWB ME/0837/A/10, 8 August 1990.

[83] SWB ME/0823/A/7, 23 July 1990.

and not for God.'[84] True Islam was the province of Arabs, not of Pakistanis or Afghanis:

> This is the second time that heresy has come from Asia in an attempt to deal a blow to pan-Arabism from within as well as deal a blow to Islam. Heresy emerged during the era of the Abassids, during the days of Mansur . . . Heresy came from Asia. It is now experiencing a renaissance, it is coming once again from Asia. The Chinese who speaks Arabic and whom we taught Islam is coming to teach us Islam![85]

In addition to being a foreign transplant, fundamentalism was inherently inimical to Arab interests. Why, Qaddafi asked, did Islamists attack Arab governments instead of Israelis? Because they were pawns in the eternal conspiracy against Arab unity:

> Non-Arab Muslims are spreading the Islamic calls . . . These calls have come from Muslims who are not Arabs, and they have been spread in the Arab homeland. Naturally, the victim in this case is Arab nationalism, Arab unity, socialism and progress . . . in the name of Islam they have entered the Arab world so they can destroy Arab nationalism.[86]

Thus, though Qaddafi accused the Islamists of being poor Muslims guilty of 'not knowing God properly,' he was perhaps more enraged by the thought that they had sinned

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[84] FBIS-NES-95-218, 13 November 1995.

[85] SWB ME/0735/A/7, 10 April 1990. For Qaddafi, all non-Arab Muslims (and most especially American Muslims) were second class worshippers. See SWB ME/0859 A/7, 3 September 1990.

[86] SWB ME/0405 A/4, 10 March 1989. In Qaddafi's rhetoric, the fiendish authors of this plot were (who else?) the United States and Israel. Palestinian Islamic Jihad must have been shocked to hear that their group was 'the same as Israeli intelligence' (SWB ME/0837/A/10, 8 August 1990). On another occasion Qaddafi opined that Islamists 'work for US intelligence and they have nothing to do with Islam or anything else.'

against Nasser.[87]

The punishment for heresy, of course, was death: 'the Brotherhood, the Takfir, the Hijra, the Da'wah, the Jihad, the Tahrir and all these heretics and pariahs should be eliminated . . . . we will confront them and even kill some of those people when necessary.'[88] It was a small leap from killing some to killing as many as possible, as Qaddafi suggested to Libyan students:

> If you find among you one who says: Da'wah or Jihad or Takfir or Ikhwan, then you should cut off his head and throw it in the street as if you found a wolf, a fox or a scorpion. This is poison. This is a devil. This is a heretic.[89]

Those not sanguinary enough to decapitate heretics themselves were instructed to alert someone less squeamish.[90] (Perhaps angered by these calls of 'off with their heads,' in October 1989 a youthful Islamist reportedly strode into a mosque and beheaded a Qaddafi loyalist with a sword.[91])

Despite the incendiary rhetoric, Qaddafi found that there was depressingly little he could do to curb the growth of the Libyan Islamist movement. In fact, his every action seemed to incubate the very movement he was trying to stamp out. His displays of piety implied that

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[87] Amnesty International, June 1991, 11.

[88] SWB ME/0735/A/7, 10 April 1990.

[89] SWB ME/0823/A/7, 23 July 1990.

[90] Burgat 1989, 604.

[91] Peter Hiett, "Fundamentalist 'cancer'", Middle East International, no. 362 (3 November 1989): 13.

religion was the ultimate source of political legitimacy, yet his heterodox interpretations of Islam eroded the last vestiges of his credibility as a believer.[92] Moreover, by disallowing the emergence of a secular opposition, the regime had inadvertently funnelled more and more dissidents into the mosques.

So long as he tried to beat the Islamists at their own game, Qaddafi had few good policy options for meeting the fundamentalist threat. Closing the mosques was obviously a non-starter. Likewise, it was politically unfeasible to ban the seemingly innocuous displays of piety which doubled as signs of passive resistance to his regime (such as beards for men and head coverings for women).[93] Nor, so long as the Islamists kept a low profile, were mass arrests an attractive option since they might create more sympathizers than they would net. Indeed, one of Qaddafi's senior security advisers was reportedly killed by an Islamist whose friends had been arrested and tortured by the regime.[94]

Consequently, Qaddafi adopted a policy of heavy surveillance and intimidation. On June 9, 1990, the

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[92] Davis, 46; Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "In search of sacred law: The meandering course of Qadhafi's legal policy," in Qadhafi's Libya: 1969 to 1994, ed. Dirk Vandewalle, (London: Macmillan, 1995), 115-118.

[93] United States Department of State, "Libya: Respect for Human Rights," in Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, Submitted to the Committee on foreign Relations, United States Senate, and the Committee on International Relations, United States House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: GPO, February 1995).

[94] NFSL Newsreport 7, no. 6 (November-December 1990): 11.

Libyan leader decreed the formation of a 'People's Guard' whose task it was to keep a watchful eye on the mosques.[95] According to a journalist who made several trips to Libya during the early 1990s, guard members or other secret police were present at all mosque services. Worshippers were not allowed to congregate after prayers.[96]

In addition, the regime took a number of steps to retard the development of transnational Islamist links. For example, Tripoli placed renewed emphasis on tracking the movements of foreigners.[97] Furthermore, Libya entered into a series of cooperative security agreements with its neighbors. The Libyan and Egyptian security services agreed to assist each other in apprehending and extraditing Islamist extremists, and Tripoli gave permission for Egyptian security units to pursue extremists across the Libyan border--an unprecedented concession.[98] Though Libya's Islamist troubles were generally concentrated in the eastern half of the country, Tripoli kept a wary eye on the deteriorating situation in Algeria and held frequent consultations with the Algerian interior ministry.[99]

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[95] SWB ME/0790/A/3, 14 June 1990; Djaziri 1990, 680.

[96] Author's interview with Jane Kokan, December 1994.

[97] FBIS-NES-94-109, 7 June 1994.

[98] FBIS-NES-94-164, 24 August 1994.

[99] See, for example, FBIS-NES-95-157, 15 August 1995, in which the Algerian interior minister praised the new level of security cooperation between Libya and Algeria. A 'hot pursuit'

These measures helped to keep the Islamist threat in check, but did not keep the movement itself from growing. Qaddafi's denunciations of the fundamentalists were themselves discredited by the Colonel's attempts to bolster his own flagging religious credentials. By equating religiosity with legitimacy, Qaddafi was entering a contest he could not win. The monastic junior officer who overthrew the monarchy in 1969 had persuaded the world of his piety with comparative ease, but the flamboyantly arrayed Colonel of 1990 was rather less convincing.

Qaddafi nevertheless made his best effort, oblivious to the fact that he was conceding the moral high ground to his opponents. He proclaimed himself 'Imam of the imams' and talked of re-establishing the institution of the caliphate (presumably with himself as caliph).[100] He chastised Arab Christians for having an 'Israeli soul' and called for the next generation of Arabs to be purely Muslim.[101] His rhetoric took on an Iranian flavor:

> Visits to America and meetings with the American President by Muslim rulers amount to a pilgrimage to the American White House, polytheism. A satanic country like that is not to be visited: no relations should be established with it, and it is *haram* for an Islamic country to establish relations with the government of America and its allies.[102]

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agreement, similar to that signed with Egypt, was concluded with Algeria in 1996 (SWB ME/2608 MED/21, 10 May 1996).

[100] Djaziri 1992, 757.

[101] SWB ME/0693/A/7, 20 February 1990.

[102] SWB ME/0720/A/5, 23 March 1990.

Moreover, Qaddafi curtailed his support of feminism, which had never garnered much support in such a traditional society. In 1993, and again in 1994, he announced the implementation of strict *sharia* punishments, which only a few years earlier he had denounced as nonsense.[103]

These gestures failed to persuade the Islamist opposition of the Colonel's piety. From their standpoint, the Colonel's somewhat unorthodox approach to Islam was nothing less than blasphemous. Qaddafi opined that religion was a purely personal matter and that religious edicts should therefore not be enforced by the state.[104] He dismissed commentaries on the Quran, commentaries which formed the bulk of Islamic law, as 'outdated books (which) have never been the Islamic faith per se.'[105] And in the introduction to the Russian version of The Green Book Qaddafi styled himself as a modern Mohammed.[106] He argued that performing the *hajj* was not obligatory for Muslims so long as the Saudi

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[103] Le Monde, 6 April 1993; "Application de la loi islamique," Le Monde, 19 February 1994. See also SWB ME/0688 A/4, 14 February 1990.

[104] SWB ME/0859 A/7, 3 September 1990.

[105] SWB ME/0405 A/4, 10 March 1989.

[106] The introduction states: 'There was a very ordinary man (Mohammed) who rode a donkey and wrote his books on scrolls, this being before the age of publishing and paper. Eventually, this man was to ride a camel, spreading his message . . . I, being a simple bedouin who rode on a donkey and looked after sheep and walked bare-foot and lived my whole life amongst simple people, present my small 'Green Book' which is like the Bible of Jesus or the Tablets of Moses or the message of the camel-rider.' Africa Confidential 30, no. 18 (8 September 1989): 8.

monarchy remained in power.[107] Even less devout Libyans were sometimes left wondering about Qaddafi's faith, as when he mocked those who prayed for pious rulers, observing (with irreverent historical accuracy) that 'the positive response to such prayers has been minimal so far.'[108] In early 1989 the Libyan newspaper *Al Jamahiriya* printed an attack on Islam itself, asking readers: 'How can you have faith?' Though retracted only hours after publication, the essay--allegedly written by Qaddafi himself--caused serious ructions.[109]

In short, the Libyan leader had doomed himself to failure in any test of religious devotion against the fundamentalists, and never seemed to grasp that by engaging in such a test he conceded the moral high ground to his opponents. This fact, coupled with the regime's declining fortunes and the robust Islamist movements in neighboring Algeria and Egypt, helped Libyan fundamentalists to win grass roots support and establish themselves as the only significant (if covert) domestic opposition to the regime. This was no small feat. Although they failed to unseat Qaddafi by the mid-1990s,

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[107] After stinging rebukes from Saudi clerics, Qaddafi backed away from this position, only to rejoin the argument in 1990 by issuing a *fatwa* (religious edict) against performing the *hajj* while U.S. forces were present in Saudi Arabia (SWB ME/0885 A/16, 3 October 1990). Since he later made a point of flying Libyan pilgrims to Mecca each year in defiance of UN sanctions, one must assume that Qaddafi revoked his own *fatwa*.

[108] SWB ME/0885 A/15, 3 October 1990.

[109] "Libya: Paradise Lost," Africa Confidential 30, no. 11, (26 May 1989), 8.

their resiliency made it probable that thereafter the most serious anti-regime challenges would operate under the aegis of Islam. Even the secular NFSL, hitherto the most prominent opposition movement, conceded that religion had become 'the last line of defense against the regime.'[110]

III. The struggle for control of the state

Islamists were by no means the only group to forcibly contest the government's control of the state. Scarcely a year passed without an attempted assassination or conspiracy. Some were foiled by ill fortune or incompetency, and others were fended off by the security services. Several such challenges were detailed in Chapter 1, which discussed Libyan internal security until 1973.

As the Al-Hawaz affair illustrated, those closest to Qaddafi posed the greatest danger to him. And indeed, when in mid-1975 Qaddafi again narrowly escaped being overthrown by members of the RCC, it was his childhood friend Omar Abdullah Al Mehaishi who led the conspiracy. Mehaishi had served in Qaddafi's cabinet in a variety of ministerial posts, but became frustrated by Qaddafi's spending priorities while serving as Minister of Planning (Mehaishi claimed to object to the favoritism shown to the Qaddadfa. After oil revenues fell by 15% in 1975,

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[110] "Regime clamps down on internal dissent," NFSL Newsreport 7, no. 4 (July-August 1990): 19.

Qaddafi elected to curb social spending and proceed with yet more arms purchases from the USSR. Mehaishi objected, arguing that Libya's oil wealth should be devoted to domestic development rather than squandered on adventurism; the result was a row within the RCC.

Mehaishi enlisted the support of two other RCC members, Bashir Hawadi and Awad Hamza, and approached others (reportedly Najm and Kharrubi) as well as some army officers in hopes of forcing Qaddafi to step down.[111]

Fortunately for Qaddafi, Mehaishi's plans were betrayed.[112] Mehaishi himself escaped to Tunisia, but his accomplices were arrested. Hawadi and Hamza were sentenced to house arrest, presumably to minimize the appearance of disorder within the RCC, which was shortly thereafter shorn of its formal role in the Libyan polity. In December 1976, no less than seventy-five army officers implicated in the plot were tried in a military court. On April 2, 1977, twenty-two of them were executed.[113] Many others were sentenced to long prison terms.[114] These purges wiped away the last vestiges of moderation from Qaddafi's inner circle and left, in Lisa Anderson's words, 'idealogues at best, sycophants at worst, but none

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[111] Wright, 186-87.

[112] Apparently by Kharrubi, who used the intelligence as a means of regaining Qaddafi's favor. See Henry Tanner, "Syria, Libya, P.L.O. shun Cairo talks," New York Times, 16 October 1975.

[113] Amnesty International, 20 November 1984, 11.

[114] Tartter, 290.

willing to stand up to the Leader of the Revolution.'[115] The regime was thus freed to pursue ever more irrational policies.

Mehaishi himself ultimately became a victim of Qaddafi's vindictiveness. After living the life of an exile in Tunisia, Egypt (where he survived a Libyan assassination attempt), and Kuwait, he found asylum in Morocco. But in 1983, King Hassan and Colonel Qaddafi struck a deal: Libya curbed its support of the Polisario Front, and in exchange Mehaishi was secretly repatriated. The Libyan dissident was never heard from again.

While in exile, Mehaishi became affiliated with a number of small Libyan opposition groups. Such groups had begun to attract the attention and support of foreign intelligence agencies. For example, five Libyan civilians were executed on April 7, 1977, after being accused of working for Egyptian intelligence. Nearly fifty more putatively pro-Egyptian officers were executed in August of that year, and still more were allegedly killed in March 1979.[116] Whether Egyptian intelligence had achieved so many deep penetrations is debatable, but there is little question that the Libyan opposition groups were forging links with a number of foreign sponsors. Foremost of these opposition cells was the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL), which

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[115] Lisa Anderson, "Libya and American foreign policy," Middle East Journal 36 (Autumn 1982): 521.

[116] Juliette Bessis, La Libye contemporaine, (Paris: l'Ecole-Polytechnique, 1986), 168; Wright, 197.

was formed on October 7, 1981, and led by Mohammed Al Maghariaf, a Libyan diplomat who defected in 1980.

Although the NFSL generated much propaganda and boasted of a large paramilitary wing, it only mounted one significant anti-regime operation. On May 6, 1984, the NFSL's military commander, Ahmed Ahwas, was killed in Zuwarah after crossing the border from Tunisia, and two of his colleagues were captured. The operation he had hoped to lead took place two days later. At 7:30 AM on May 8, two dozen NFSL guerrillas attacked Qaddafi's headquarters at the Bab al-Aziziya barracks. After initial success--the NFSL penetrated into the compound--the attack foundered and nine NFSL commandos were killed. The survivors fled to nearby safehouses, but all were discovered and killed within two weeks.

The NFSL attack was not solely an internal security matter; at least one reputable source reports that the assault was orchestrated by France's Direction de la Sécurité Extérieure in conjunction with the CIA. Moreover, it is well known that the Reagan Administration bankrolled the NFSL's presence in Chad.[117] The attack should therefore be understood, at least in part, as a consequence of Libya's repeated challenges to larger powers. In any event, the NFSL's audacity provoked a major crackdown on dissident elements. According to the U.S. Department of State's estimation, more than five

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[117] Seymour Hersh, "Target Qaddafi," New York Times Magazine, 22 February 1987.

thousand Libyans were arrested during the ensuing purges, and perhaps more than a hundred were executed.[118] The NFSL's covert infrastructure was apparently rendered inutile, and no further commando raids were attempted. Notwithstanding sporadic attempts to forge a broader anti-Qaddafi movement, the Libyan opposition never managed to form a credible government in exile.[119] Riven by jealousy, the various factions all but disappeared once the Bush administration returned America's Libya policy to its natural center of gravity.[120]

Thus, the gravest threats to the Libyan leader did not arise from declared opponents to his regime but from those within his own retinue. Qaddafi entrusted his own security to his closest comrades and kinsmen, a dependency that became problematic as he fell out with one after another of them. Captain Muhammad Idris al-Sharif, a childhood friend of Qaddafi's who had long served as a director of Military Intelligence, was arrested in 1977 and accused of organizing three attempts to kill the Libyan leader. His brother-in-law, Capt. Muhammad al-Said, was also arrested. At the time Capt. al-Said was serving as commander of Libya's largest airbase, Uqba bin Naf'i; approximately one hundred soldiers from the 7th Armoured Brigade stationed at the

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[118] Tartter, 290.

[119] See Ali El-Roz and Antoine Jalkh, "Les anti-Kadhafi de A à Z," Arabies (October 1995): 20-31.

[120] Andrew Lycett, "The divided opponents of Qadhafi," Middle East International, no. 300 (15 May 1987): 14-15.

base were also arrested.[121]

In November 1985 another close friend of Qaddafi's and luminary of the regime, Colonel Hassan Ishkal, was summarily executed after being summoned to Qaddafi's barracks in the middle of the night. Though Ishkal reportedly had some disagreements with the Colonel over the war in Chad, the real reason for his demise was apparently that he had grown too popular for his own good.[122]

By the 1980s, more than half of the original members of the Revolutionary Command Council had defected, been executed, or placed under house arrest. Even Major Jalloud, who for years was considered Qaddafi's right hand man and heir apparent, was banished to Syria for a period. After his return he was consigned to semi-house arrest for a spell and then 'retired.'[123]

The exact causes of Jalloud's fall from grace are shrouded in some mystery. Qaddafi may have suspected him of involvement in the October 1993 coup attempt launched by Jalloud's fellow tribesmen, the Megarha. Not long afterwards, Jalloud (perhaps sensing he was under

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[121] Gwynne Dyer, "Libya," in World armies, ed. John Keegan, (London: Macmillan, 1983), 374.

[122] For details of Ishkal's demise, see Martin Sicker, The making of a pariah state: The adventurist politics of Muammar Qaddafi, (New York: Praeger, 1987), 41-44.

[123] FBIS-NES-94-183, 21 September 1994; "Jalloud 'under house arrest' following coup attempt," Middle East Economic Digest 37, no. 44 (5 November 1993): 29. For more on Jalloud's falling out with Qaddafi, see the author's "Libyan threat perception" in Jane's Intelligence Review 7, no. 9 (September 1995): 407-410.

suspicion) reportedly incensed Qaddafi by requesting permission to live abroad.[124] Qaddafi refused this request and confiscated Jalloud's passport, although he permitted his former aide to move freely in social circles. By the end of 1994 Jalloud had resumed some ceremonial duties, yet by all indications he had ceased to be a player in Qaddafi's inner circle. Jalloud's confidants were purged from the government as well. For example, Omar el Hariri, once the military governor of Tobruk and a prominent Free Unionist Officer, was arrested because he was considered to be a Jalloud loyalist.[125]

Whether Jalloud's removal reflected paranoia on Qaddafi's part is moot (and largely irrelevant). The Libyan leader had proven that he had no permanent friends--only a permanent interest in survival. In that regard, pre-emptively neutralizing his potential foes was a prudent and rational course of action, whatever the personal cost. With the RCC out of the way, the Islamists on the defensive and the secular opposition consumed with petty internal rivalries, only one major threat to Qaddafi's survival remained: the armed forces.

Despite the regime's lavish spending on military hardware, morale in the LAF was habitually low. The reasons for this were several. First, the conscription

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[124] "Libya's restive tribes," Foreign Report, no. 2316 (18 August 1994): 3-4.

[125] "Libye: arrestation d'un officier supérieur," Le Monde, 25-26 September 1994; FBIS-NES-94-185, 23 September 1994.

system was inequitable: the privileged escaped military service, the poor did not.[126] Second, the omnipresent political controls (such as the Revolutionary Committee members) fostered a climate of distrust.[127] During the first few months of 1980, for example, approximately two thousand Libyans were arrested for political purposes, among them a number of senior army officials who were charged with corruption. All suspects were tried before revolutionary tribunals operating beyond the bounds of the regular judiciary; more than a hundred were allegedly executed.[128] Third, the LAF repeatedly found itself conducting operations that inspired little or no enthusiasm in the ranks (e.g., occupation duty in Chad). Finally, the LAF's dismal combat performance was a source of deep humiliation.

Officers who saw an opportunity to defect often did. For example, in 1980 an LAF MiG pilot tried to reach freedom in Italy but crashed while searching for an Italian airport.[129] In February of the following year

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[126] Conscription was so unpopular that the regime had to constantly threaten draft dodgers, sometimes with death. See, for example, Qaddafi's remarks to the General People's Congress in Benghazi (SWB ME/0404 A/2, 9 March 1989).

[127] Omar El Fathaly and Monte Palmer, "Institutional development in Qadhafi's Libya," in Qadhafi's Libya: 1969 to 1994, ed. Dirk Vandewalle, (London: Macmillan, 1995), 172-73.

[128] George Joffé, "Libya: The decline of Qadafi," Middle East International, no. 127 (20 June 1980): 9-10.

[129] SWB ME/6502/A/10, 20 August 1980. Demetrio Cogliandro, former head of the Italian secret service, alleges that the MiG was shot down by NATO fighters during an attempt to assassinate Colonel Qaddafi that inadvertently destroyed an Itavia DC-9 on June 27, 1980. See Andrew Gumbel, "NATO attack on Gaddafi blamed

another LAF pilot flew to Greece and received asylum.[130] In July 1984, yet another MiG-23 pilot defected to Egypt, where he revealed that the Libyan pilots had been training to bomb the Aswan High Dam.[131] In January 1987 Mohammed Tala Shelhi, nephew of Col. Abdul Aziz Shelhi of the old regime, piloted a Cessna over Libya's new coastal defenses and escaped to Italy.[132] Within the next six months eight officers flew their aircraft to Egypt and requested political asylum, leading the Egyptian defence minister to remark that the entire Libyan air force was prepared to defect.[133] A military helicopter pilot defected to Egypt in April 1989.[134] Similar defections plagued the diplomatic corps.

This string of defections was embarrassing but did little harm, aside from the loss of a few aircraft and whatever classified information the pilots divulged. Sabotage, of which the regime frequently complained, was costly and pointed to even more disgruntlement within the LAF, though some alleged incidents of sabotage may have merely been the result of incompetence. (On one occasion

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for air disaster," Independent, 8 January 1996; "Plane 'shot down in failed Libyan coup,' Guardian, 10 January 1996.

[130] SWB ME/6648/i, 13 February 1981.

[131] Jacqueline Hahn, "Libya: Intelligence briefing," IDF Journal 3, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 34.

[132] NFSL Newsletter no. 54, January 1987, 4.

[133] Tom Porteous "Dissidents on the run," Middle East International, no. 305 (25 July 1987): 10-11.

[134] SWB ME/0445 i, 28 April 1989.

Libyan soldiers were thought to have immolated themselves by lighting a propane heater inside of an ammunition bunker.) True or not, securing weapon and ammunition stores was problematic for the regime. In early 1984 an ammunition depot at Al-Abyar in Cyrenaica was rocked by a massive explosion.[135] In June 1992 another arms depot An al-Siwana, a suburb of Tripoli, exploded killing 9 and injuring 143.[136] In July 1994 there was an attempted coup near Ajdabiya and a raid on an ammunition dump in Sebha.[137] The next month Libyan authorities reported the disappearance of weapons and ammunition from a storage depot close to Ajdabiya and subsequently arrested scores of suspects, particularly youths.[138] Thereafter, authorities began consolidating weapons in the central military zone. Saboteurs, however, were not his most pressing concern.

A surprising number of LAF officers took it in their heads to assassinate their Commander-in-Chief, but it was no simple thing to kill a man who himself had seized power through a coup d'etat. As Qaddafi was well aware, a successful conspiracy required two things: a small number of participants (to minimize the risk of leaks), and access to the Colonel. Since few would-be assassins could meet the latter criteria, it was unsurprising that

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[135] Harris, 76.

[136] Associated Press, 20 June 1992.

[137] Kokan, 1.

[138] FBIS-NES-94-147, 1 August 1994.

most of the conspiracies which did mature involved senior military officials. For example, Colonel Khalifa Khadir, who commanded Libyan forces in their 1980 invasion of Chad, was promoted to general upon his return. While sharing a jeep with Qaddafi, the new general drew his pistol and fired point blank at Qaddafi. He missed, or (depending upon the account) merely wounded Qaddafi in the shoulder, and was cut down by the Colonel's East German bodyguard before he could fire again.[139] After another abortive coup attempt in January 1983, five officers were executed, including the Deputy Commander of the People's Militia (the Libyan equivalent of a national guard or territorial army).[140]

Many of the most interesting efforts to kill Qaddafi originated in the air force. In March 1978 a helicopter that was carrying several East German officials, and which was supposed to have been ferrying Qaddafi, crashed in an apparent assassination attempt.[141] In April 1979, according to a Cairene newspaper, Libyan pilots planned to attack Qaddafi's headquarters with rockets during a training mission. One of the plotters informed on his comrades, who were immediately arrested. Another eleven officers were arrested after unsuccessfully attempting to plant an explosive in Qaddafi's car. In 1981 an air

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[139] Hersh, op. cit.; cf. Andrew Lycett, 1982, 18.

[140] Tartter, 209.

[141] David Binder, "U.S. says Qaddafi escaped plot fatal to 4 East Germans," New York Times, 29 March 1978; FBIS-MEA, 12 March 1978, 12.

force officer and a subordinate were caught while trying to assassinate Qaddafi at the grand opening of a supermarket in Derna.[142]

Larger mutinies were even less successful, either because the mutineers were betrayed by a comrade or because the mutiny progressed too slowly, allowing the regime to rally its forces. For example, in August 1980 an intelligence officer, Major Idris Shuhaibi, led the Tobruk garrison to mutiny and allegedly tried to lure Qaddafi to the base to kill him. When the Colonel failed to appear, the mutineers lost the initiative and were crushed by security forces.[143] Similarly, soldiers at the Al Abyar barracks, situated close to the Egyptian border, rebelled in March 1984 but failed to move quickly enough. More than two hundred were killed as the uprising was suppressed.[144]

Unrest in the LAF peaked in the mid 1980s, no doubt because Libya's embroilment in Chad and its conflict with the United States were cresting at that time. Seventy senior officers were forced into retirement in late 1984, and sixty were arrested the following spring.[145] The commanding officer of Al-Watiyah Air Force Base was arrested for opposing military action against Tunisia in

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[142] Amnesty International, June 1991, 14.

[143] SWB ME/6502/A/10, 20 August 1980; Lycett 1982, 18; John Cooley, Libyan sandstorm: The complete account of Qaddafi's revolution, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 199.

[144] Bessis, 170.

[145] Harris, 73; Tartter, 290.

August 1985.[146] Some forty-three officers who supported him were executed.[147] Another sixty were reportedly put to death over the next two years.[148]

Consequently, Qaddafi's preoccupation with his own survival became more intense. He adopted the tactics of a guerrilla leader, rotating between residences, abruptly changing his itinerary, riding in different cars in his convoy. When he took to the air in his personal jet all other Libyan planes were grounded.[149] During the 1st of September celebrations in 1985, East European advisers were seen in his security detail for the first time, and Soviet intelligence reportedly tipped him off to several plots against him.[150]

Despite these precautions, at times Qaddafi's survival owed itself as much to serendipity as to careful planning. To those who wished to see his demise, the Colonel--much like Cuba's Fidel Castro--simply seemed to live a charmed life. The U.S. Air Force, for example, was amazed that Qaddafi survived the 1986 bombing of his

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[146] "Libyan army reportedly thwarts troop rebellion against Qaddafi," New York Times, 2 September 1985.

[147] "Libya: A lonely Colonel," Africa Confidential, 27 no. 1 (2 January 1986): 1; FBIS 12 September 1985, D1; Mohamed El Khawas, Qaddafi: His ideology in theory and practice, (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1986), 112.

[148] René Lemarchand, ed., The green and the black, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), 12.

[149] Harris 1986, 50.

[150] Sicker, 44; New York Times, 20 July 1981.

residence in Tripoli.[151] Improbable though it seemed, the Colonel's luck held. In March 1989, he was assaulted by a knife-wielding assailant while walking with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad. The attacker was killed by one of Assad's bodyguards; Qaddafi escaped with a light wound. A few weeks later another would-be assassin got cold feet at the last minute and dropped the two grenades he had planned to throw at the Colonel.[152] Fortune had once again smiled upon the Libyan leader.

Conclusion

The role of chance in the Libyan leader's many brushes with death might lead some to argue that Qaddafi's survival was no more evidence of efficacious security policy than longevity is necessarily evidence of good health in people. According to this line of reasoning, states, like people, may simply be favored with constitutions that can withstand neglect and abuse. In Libya, one could hypothesize that the absence of a mature civil society combined with an influx of unprecedented oil wealth to produce a placid, politically apathetic citizenry--an environment in which even an inept leader could survive with comparative ease.

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[151] Hersh, op. cit. The bombing came so close to achieving its unstated purpose--to kill the Libyan leader, or induce the Libyan armed forces to do so--that Qaddafi immediately replaced his head of internal security. John Bulloch, "Gaddafi sacks his chief of security," Daily Telegraph, 22 April 1986.

[152] "Libya: Gaddafi's fundamental problem" Africa Confidential 30, no. 13 (23 June 1989): 7.

However, such an assessment is overly stingy. Qaddafi weathered too many internal threats for serendipity alone to account for his survival. His internal security policies must therefore be credited with success and deemed rational. In this one area, Qaddafi accomplished what he set out to do--to keep himself in power for as long as possible, and to maximize his own authority at the expense of all other aspirants to national leadership.

He, of course, would never admit that such was his intention, and it may well be that in the idealistic days of his youth, Qaddafi truly saw his own survival as a means of preserving the Libyan 'revolution' rather than as an end unto itself. If so, time and the experience of power wrought predictable changes in his value system. Self-preservation became his final and all-consuming preoccupation.

In and of itself, this preoccupation did not make Qaddafi rational. Rationality, as we have defined it, inheres not in the wisdom of a goal but in the successful attainment of goals. Granted, there are schools of thought which take self-preservation to be the supreme expression of rationality; Montesquieu, for example, observed that 'a rational army would run away.'[153] However, as Nietzsche reminds us, we 'should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being,' the verity of

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[153] As quoted in Keegan, 329.

that thesis being neither philosophically self-evident nor empirically established.[154] Indeed, upon reflection the reduction of rationality to biological directives is less straight forward than one might think. The instinct for survival is strong, but one can persuasively argue that other instincts--the maternal instinct to protect one's offspring, for example--are stronger still, and no less rational.

Why then should we deem Qaddafi's internal security policies rational? Because they worked. This is not to say that those policies were always optimal, or that they did not have counterproductive spillover effects. By prohibiting the emergence of a legal opposition, the regime tended to channel dissidence into extremism. By trying to establish his Islamic credentials, Qaddafi reinforced the legitimacy of his Islamist opponents. Moreover, by eliminating insignificant opposition figures living in exile the regime was clearly moving into the realms of the irrational: the marginal increases in security thereby derived came at a steep cost to the state's foreign policy objectives.

Insomuch as Qaddafi's internal security policies were intended to mobilize political support for his agenda (as the creation of the Revolutionary Committees was intended to do), they were markedly less successful. In fairness, this was in large part because Qaddafi, who

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[154] Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond good and evil, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), 21.

at one time was intent on transforming Libyan society in accordance with his philosophical predilections, grew less sure of the enterprise over time. In particular, the bankruptcy of his economic development policies contributed to general unrest and to his Islamist troubles, which in turn generated tighter repression. As Qaddafi himself put it: 'those who have nothing to offer use force to control the masses.'[155]

Finally, one might question whether Qaddafi *felt more secure* at the conclusion of a quarter-century as head of state than he did ten, fifteen, or twenty years earlier. That he had more of the accoutrements of security--bodyguards and armoured limousines--cannot be doubted, but these did not necessarily make him more secure. Security, after all, is as much--if not more--a mental construct than a measure of objective reality. Qaddafi, because of the nature of the political system he created, lived with a degree of insecurity even higher than that experienced by the average Libyan. The constant fear of assassination, the interminable games of cat-and-mouse with friend and foe, and the stress of command took an extraordinary physical toll on the middle-aged Colonel. Those who knew him in his younger days were shocked at his rapid deterioration.[156] Security, even when pursued rationally, remained an elusive quantity for the Libyan leader.

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[155] SWB ME/0783/A/10, 6 June 1990.

[156] Miller, 231.

Conclusion

What has Libya done? . . . I saw that after a quarter of a century, all we had done was to establish social welfare . . . we did not create something strategic, with the exception of the great man-made river.

-- Muammar El Qaddafi[1]

The admission of failure by a head of state is a sufficiently rare event as to justify the attention of scholars, even when that admission is somewhat ambiguous. In the case of the above quote, the Libyan leader's language is maddeningly imprecise: what did he mean by declaring Libya's failure to 'create something strategic,' and what--if any--responsibility did he assume for that failure? Intriguing though these questions may be, they do not make the Colonel's admission any less noteworthy, nor must they prevent us from observing that his comments--even if made in reference to 'strategic' economic development--could just as appropriately been made with reference to Libyan national security policy. For Libya's failure to produce 'something strategic' certainly extended beyond mere deficiencies of infrastructure. A quarter of a century after its dramatic inception, the Libyan regime had manifestly failed to achieve any of its core national security objectives.

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[1] SWB ME/1639 A/8, 17 March 1993.

As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, this failure occurred not so much because Libya was the victim of imperialist machinations (as the Libyan regime would have the world believe), but because the national security policies adopted by Tripoli were almost invariably counterproductive. This pattern of counterproductive behavior originated in both systemic and personal forces. On the one hand, the nature of the Libyan polity afforded its leader an inordinate degree of latitude in designing and implementing policies, while insulating him from their negative repercussions. In addition, the incompatibility between Libya's objectives and its policies was reflective of the Libyan leader's inability to reconcile his world view with geostrategic reality.

Individually, each of the preceding chapters tested this thesis against one period or facet of Libyan national security policy. Taken in conjunction, the emergent picture is of a state whose security was routinely jeopardized, rather than enhanced, by the policies established in Tripoli.

Upon seizing power in 1969, Muammar El Qaddafi began re-aligning Libyan national security policy in accordance with his world view. Believing Libya to be inherently insecure in a world dominated by larger powers (and in which the Arabs were divided and weakened by the existence of the state of Israel), Qaddafi decided to change the status quo. By transforming Libya into the

catalyst for an Arab supra-state, he hoped to transform the existing balance of power and thereby remedy his security dilemma. To that end, he allied himself with Nasser's Egypt, expelled U.S. and British forces from Libya, and re-armed Libya's military forces. In the Mediterranean he laid claim to the Gulf of Sirte and sought NATO's expulsion from Malta.

Tripoli's Pan-Arab vocation soon ran into unexpected difficulties, not least of which was Anwar Sadat. Libya's new national security orientation had not anticipated, nor could it accommodate, an Egyptian leader determined to pursue Egypt's interests by making peace with Israel. Consequently, relations between Tripoli and Cairo steadily worsened after the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Oblivious to the possibility that Tripoli's disputations with Cairo were creating the very breach in the Arab world that Qaddafi continuously accused the Western powers of attempting to create, Libya brazenly fomented insurrection in Egypt's western province, and the two former allies engaged in their own brief war in 1977. Elsewhere, Libya showed remarkable consistency in alienating the very states which might have ameliorated its strategic position. In Algeria, Tunisia, Malta, Niger and Sudan, prospective alliances came to naught, in large part because the Libyan regime was quick to employ subversion whenever its partners failed to meet Tripoli's expectations.

Throughout the 1970's Libya engaged in a series of

increasingly provocative behaviors towards the Western powers, notably the United States and Great Britain. Tripoli denounced American and British foreign policy, forcibly challenged freedom of navigation and air travel in the Gulf of Sirte, rendered aid to terrorists, and attempted to assassinate Libyan dissidents residing in England and the United States. Even the relatively cautious Carter administration was obliged to put Libya on notice that such behaviors could precipitate severe consequences. Moreover, these behaviors did little if anything to advance Libya towards its goal of reducing America's regional influence and thereby promoting Libyan security. To the contrary, U.S. influence steadily increased and, despite Tripoli's best efforts, ultimately brought about peace between Egypt and Israel.

The emerging crisis with Washington became acute after the advent of the Reagan administration. Faced with an openly hostile White House, Qaddafi engaged the new American President in a series of verbal and then military confrontations. These engagements gave the Libyan regime an unprecedented level of prominence in the international community, but they also enabled Washington to discredit the modernized army Libya had energetically assembled over the preceding decade. In addition, these engagements revealed that the Libyan-Soviet friendship was far less consequential than many--perhaps including the Libyan leadership--had presumed. The Kremlin clearly did not share Tripoli's appetite for conflict.

Moreover, by attempting to coerce neighboring states into supporting Libyan foreign policy, Tripoli ended up driving those states into other alliances (e.g., Egypt and Sudan, and Tunisia and Algeria) or deeper into America's embrace. Finally, Libya's use of extremist (e.g., the murder of WPC Fletcher) turned the country into a pariah state. Instead of increasing its political influence in the Middle East and beyond, Qaddafi's state became increasingly isolated.

The end of the decade brought with it closure of a sort. The United Nations Security Council, acting at the behest of its permanent Western members, sanctioned Libya for its alleged role in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. The sanctions regimen left the state's oil revenues intact but crimped the regime's foreign and defence policies. Tripoli was forced to curtail the size of its diplomatic missions abroad, and restrictions on air travel to Tripoli increased Libya's diplomatic isolation. Moreover, because of the prohibitions on purchasing additional military hardware and the loss of its foreign military advisors, Libya's military might--hitherto the focal point of the regime's security planning--began a steady erosion. Apart from a persistent yet dubious program to develop chemical and biological weapons, Libya ceased to pose a credible military threat to Israel, the NATO powers, and all but the weakest of its neighbors.

Perhaps in no other conflict were the shortcomings of Libyan national security policy so etched in relief as

in Libya's war in Chad, a war which proved disastrous both in military and geopolitical terms. The unprecedented casualties Libya suffered in 1986 shattered the army's morale and revealed Libya's inability to fight a modern war. Not only did Qaddafi fail to achieve his primary war aim (annexation), he also failed to achieve his stated objective of securing Libya's southern border. Instead, he provided Libya's enemies--France, the United States, Egypt and Sudan--with an arena for bleeding off Libya's military strength, thereby limiting the regime's ability to project power elsewhere. In short, Libya's war in Chad exemplified the self-defeating nature of the regime's policies.

In contrast to Libya's foreign adventures, where the price of failure could be high for the nation but small for the Libyan leader personally, internal security was the one area in which Qaddafi could not afford failure. Consequently, his internal security policies--which aimed to keep Qaddafi in power and to maximize his authority--were rational and efficacious. Nevertheless, security (even when pursued rationally) is an elusive quantity for a totalitarian leader. By the early 1990's, circumstances within Libya were forcing the regime to abandon its foreign adventures and focus instead upon the task of managing social unrest in an era of declining petroleum revenues. Internal security challenges, be they tribal, secular, or Islamist in nature, increased in frequency and intensity and demanded more of Qaddafi's

attention.

These then were the results of Libyan national security policy after a quarter of a century of Muammar El Qaddafi's leadership: Libya cringed beneath the gaze of the United Nations Security Council, its diplomacy enervated, its military crippled, its economy ailing, its populace restless. Clearer evidence of the counterproductive consequences of Libyan national security policy could scarcely be imagined. Qaddafi's objective, after all, had been to precipitate the resurgence of not just Libya but of the entire Arab nation. Yet after a quarter century the Arab nation, as the Libyan leader himself admitted, was further from achieving that resurgence than ever. Qaddafi failed at his one self-anointed task in life: he did not make himself, his state, or the Arab nation strong. Instead he perpetuated, and often worsened, their condition of weakness.

Having considered the nature, origins, and consequences of Libyan national security policy, we might well ask whether there is something in the Libyan experience which exceeds, in the words of military historian John Keegan, that which 'is stubbornly local and particular'?[2] Specifically, are there lessons in the Libyan experience which might prove relevant to the study of national security policy making in other developing

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[2] John Keegan, The mask of command, (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987), 1.

states?

Although this thesis has dealt at length with the national security policies of a single state, our purpose has indeed been to deal with the more fundamental issues which are also at stake here, issues which are relevant not only to other developing states but to established states as well. Had Libyan national security policy only occasionally proven counterproductive it would be of less theoretical significance as a case study. It is not self-defeating behavior, but an extensive pattern of self-defeating behavior which warrants further examination. The puzzle is to understand why a rational entity would repeat the same mistake again and again. As Qaddafi observed (in an essay cryptically directed to the 'incapable ones'):

> The truly strange thing in your lives is that you not only fail, but fail to learn your lesson. Any effect on you is not taken advantage of as a useful experience, no matter how much you fail you never change. No matter how much your beliefs betray you, this is never accepted by you.[3]

Libya displayed an equally remarkable resistance to the lessons of experience, a resistance so obviously out of synch with the predictions of mainstream international relations theory as to demand a re-examination of the assumption that all actors are rational.

Such an examination reveals first, that though the assumption of rationality may be useful for theoretical

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[3] Muammar Qaddafi, "Death to the incapable . . . until revolution," in Escape to hell and other stories (New York: Stanké, 1998), 158.

purposes, there is no compelling reason apart from convenience to assume its applicability to the real world. Moreover, rationality--in its common academic usage--tells us remarkably little that is worth knowing. For example, the employment of cost-benefit analysis is routinely touted as evidence of rationality but is rarely enlightening, since the pay-off matrices are almost always supple enough to accommodate any decision--even one that directly contradicts an actor's previous choices. In other words, no one ever makes an irrational choice because irrational choices are a logical impossibility; rationality itself is reduced to its lowest common denominator, choice.

By presenting an operational definition of rationality that attempts to make the concept both meaningful and measurable, this thesis has attempted to open up an avenue of inquiry which might make strategic studies more reflective of the real world and, consequently, of greater relevance to policy makers. Much more remains to be done. It is worth noting in this regard that many of the courses taught at the United States National Defense University (which provides post-graduate level training to senior American officials) are constructed with the belief that 'non-rational factors' (e.g., bureaucratic dynamics, domestic politics, and personalities) are at least as important in the policy-making process as are rational assessments of the national interest. This official interest in

understanding the workings of less-than-rational states suggests that adherents of strategic studies should be in the forefront of exploring the potential impact of irrational actors.

Additional suggestions for further research arise with regards to Libya. It is conceivable that upon the passing of the current regime, Libya, like other closed societies which have been transformed in recent years, will undergo a liberalization that will at least partially open the state and its archives to foreign scholars. It should then be possible to write a much richer history of a regime many of whose internal deliberations remain--at the time of this writing--largely beyond the purview of academic scrutiny. One can hope that, among other things, a more detailed understanding of the regime's decision-making processes and strategic calculus would emerge from such a history. Such an understanding would be of particular interest to students of deterrence and non-proliferation.

Whether such a liberalization will be forthcoming in the near future is impossible to predict. In any event, one fears that the information gleaned thereby would be of fleeting historical interest. If recent history is any indication, Libya does not, as a rule, excite great or prolonged attention from scholars or journalists. The study of Libyan society and government is therefore likely to remain the province of a distinct few.

Pending such a liberalization, perhaps the most

fruitful lines of academic enquiry suggested by this thesis pertain not to Libya but to an intellectual problem that has more often than not been circumambulated by the pretense that all actors are rational: how does one cope with an irrational actor?

This is not just an intellectual problem but, in the context of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, a substantial policy dilemma for developed and developing states alike. For those who must plan for the worst contingencies, the admission of irrationality is at once terrifying and morally perplexing. Should, as Locke suggests, those who have removed themselves from the 'commonlaw of reason' be treated as beasts of prey, who may be killed before they actually attack?[4] In other words, is pre-emption a legitimate or desirable course of action when confronting an irrational proliferant?

The findings of this thesis would suggest not. If irrationality is more often an indulgence made possible by the lack of accountability mechanisms than an innate mental defect; it follows that irrational actors are not necessarily undeterrable. A cursory reading of Iraqi history, for example, would suggest that Saddam Hussein may fall into the category of actors whose behavior is at times counterproductive (and therefore irrational by our standards), but who are nevertheless deterrable--at times, eminently so. Further enquiry into the problems

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[4] John Locke, Second treatise of government, originally published 1690, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980): 14.

of coping with irrational proliferants would therefore be useful.

Conclusion

Because its meaning is a question of perception as well as of objective reality, security is an inescapably amorphous concept. Disagreements between reasonable people as to whether, and to what degree, a given state is secure are frequent and frequently vigorous. So too, are debates over how best to procure security.

Third World states, we noted earlier, are generally obliged by circumstance to pursue security within narrower economic and politico-military parameters than are developed states. But circumstance alone is not determinative. To the ruling elite belongs the prerogative of defining a nation's security interests, of establishing security objectives, and of devising and implementing policies to reach those objectives. Thus, whether a state pursues security through economic growth or militarization, through alliances or non-alignment, through eschewing conflict or provoking the same, the quality of a state's leadership in its national security affairs will be critical--and perhaps decisive--in determining the ultimate outcome of that pursuit.

Lamentably, many developing states have adopted the highly centralized, authoritarian leadership structures so conducive to irrational leadership. Such states are perhaps least able to bear the costs incurred by leaders

who themselves remain insulated from the suffering occasioned by their policies. Yet no state is invulnerable to the risks created by irrational leaders, and in an era of instantaneous communication and also instantaneous destruction, none of us are immune to the consequences.

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